

# AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN FIREARMS IN THE HERMITAGE MUSEUM

by Dr. Leonid Tarassuk

The outstanding collection of firearms which is presently part of the Hermitage, one of the largest museums all over the world, was initially made up from personal accessions of the Grand Duke Nikolai Pavlovitch who displayed great interest in old weapons and other military historical relics. When the founder of this collection ascended the throne, the weapons collected were exhibited in the Alexander Palace located in Tsarskoye Selo, near Petersburg, and since 1834 — in the large park pavilion known as the Tsarskoselsky Arsenal where the collection kept growing for fifty years, subsequently taking a world lead in its richness and scientific value.

The Imperial collection grew larger from various sources. The best pieces of weapons captured by the Russian army in the wars against Persia, Turkey, in the Caucasus and Central Asia were sent to the Armoury. Particularly valuable arms and cavalry harnesses selected in the armouries of old Russian fortresses, the *Kunstammer* of Peter the Great and the Stable Museum were brought there. Large quantities of arms and armour were purchased on the instructions of Nicholas I from Russian and foreign collectors at European auctions and in the Orient. As the collection became better known, more presents from heads of foreign states, members of the Tsar family, Russian and overseas dignitaries, antiquaries and gunmakers arrived. Besides, complete collections and cabinets of personal weapons which belonged to Nicholas I, Alexander II and Grand Duke Mikhail Pavlovitch were added to the Tsarskoselsky Arsenal at different times.

More than seven thousand various pieces of arms, cavalry harness, banners and other militaria were collected in the Tsarskoselsky Arsenal throughout the first fifty years of its existence. What is more, a voluminous library composed of old and modern publications dealing with the history of weapons, art of war, fencing etc. was attached to the Armoury. F. Gille, the arms connoisseur, who directed the efforts to collect, study and exhibit the materials in the halls of the arms museum accessible to general public, played a leading role among the Armoury directors during this period.

In 1885, when the Medieval and Renaissance department was established in the Hermitage Museum, a decision was made to merge it with the collections of the Tsarskoselsky Arsenal where a very small and the least valuable part of weapons (mostly dating from the nineteenth century) was left. As a consequence, the Hermitage gained some



seven thousand exhibits, with about one third of the pieces displayed at the exhibition of arms, armour and works of medieval applied art opened in 1888. E. E. Lenz, who revised most of the collected materials in the light of fresh scientific data, was in charge of the Hermitage arms collection in 1899-1919.

After the Great October Socialist Revolution, the State Hermitage Museum incorporated a great number of works of art from nationalized private collections. For the Hermitage collection of weapons, the acquisitions of great importance came from the former Imperial Anitchkov Palace Armoury and the arms and armour which had belonged to several generations of the Count Sheremetevs family. Both these collections comprised some four and a half thousand pieces dating back to the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries. With these and other accessions of the post-revolutionary period, the Hermitage collection almost doubled, as compared to the Tsarskoselsky Arsenal. In the twenties, when the Oriental Arts and Culture Department was established, all Asian weapons, i.e. some five thousand pieces, were transferred to it while the European and American arms remained in the West-European Arts Department.

At present the Hermitage collections of arms and armour incorporate not less than two and a half thousand pieces of hand firearms and various accessories for them. Over two thousand of these exhibits covering the period from the second half of the fifteenth through the second half of the nineteenth centuries had been manufactured by European and U.S. gunmakers.

The section of Russian firearms numbering about six hundred items rates first in its richness. Of particular value is a large group of pieces manufactured by Tula gunmakers and decorators in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the series of firearms made for the members of the Tsar family



Figure 1. The Hermitage Museum, Leningrad



Figure 2. Arms and Armor in the Store Room



Figure 3. Swords in the Store Room

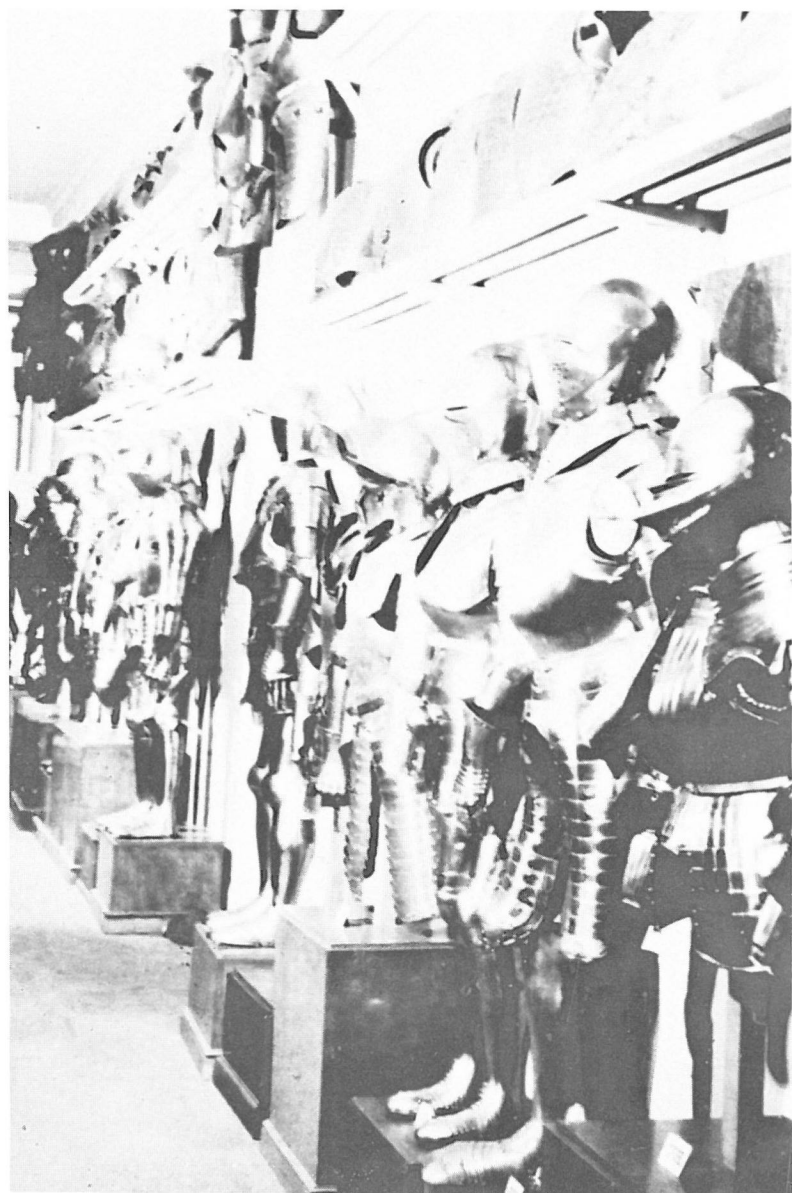


Figure 4. Armor display

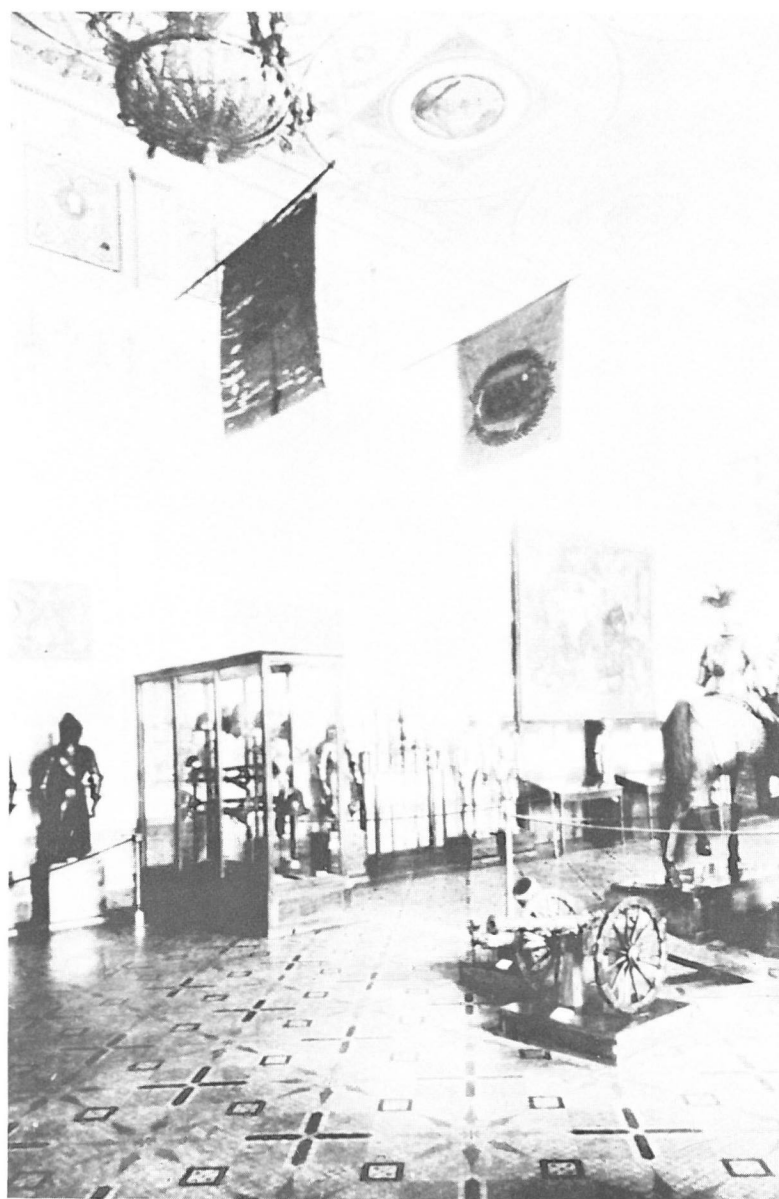


Figure 5. Display Hall

and other dignitaries being unique in size and quality. The guns and pistols manufactured by Petersburg gunmakers during the same period are also well represented in the Russian section.

The German, Austrian and Czech firearms from various gun-making centres such as Augsburg, Nürnberg, Dresden, München, Wien, Praha and other Central European cities famous for their gun production include many first-class specimens dating back to the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, this section being almost as numerous and significant in the Hermitage collection.

The section of French firearms runs to some two hundred and fifty items produced for the most part by Paris gunmakers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Of particular interest is a large series of fine works of art from the Versailles workshop

headed by N.-N. Boutet. An appreciable group of French weapons dates from the second half of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, two unique pieces coming from the Louis XIII's *Cabinet d'Armes*.

The Italian and Netherlandish firearms are represented in the Hermitage collection in almost the same amounts, i.e. up to one hundred items from each country, the arms from Brescia, Southern Italy, Utrecht, Maastricht and Liege dating back to the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries prevailing.

The sections of other countries number several dozens of pieces each. Among the Polish and Lithuanian items, of special interest are fairly rare specimens dating from the seventeenth century and superbly decorated weapons produced by the



Figure 6. Top: Wheel-lock holster pistol. Barrel-smith's mark, H. D. and a salamander within a shield. The lock plate stamped with the mark of the maker, Hans Stopler of Nürnberg, a spur within a shield (cf. Stöckel 1054). The stock inlaid with engraved stag horn. A cleaning tip with a screw driver for the ramrod. L 483/281, C 18.5. German, Nürnberg, mid-sixteenth century. 3.0. No. 128.

Middle: Pair of holster and belt wheel-lock pistols. On the barrel the marks: HB, a pair of antlers, a hammer (?). The stocks inlaid with engraved horn. On the left of the stocks, the belt hooks. L 560/360, C 13.5. German, about 1575. 3.0. Nos. 6661, 6662.

Lower: Wheel-lock belt pistol. The barrel bears engraved ornament and the initials LPS. The pan of the lock dated 1576, on the lock plate a mark BS and a griffin in a shield. On the left of the steel stock the belt hook. L 391/263, C 11.3. German, dated 1576. 3.0. No. 5947.

Bottom: Wheel-lock spanner with screw driver and hammer. Chiselled and engraved steel. North Italian (?), about 1560-1580. 3.0. No. 6667.



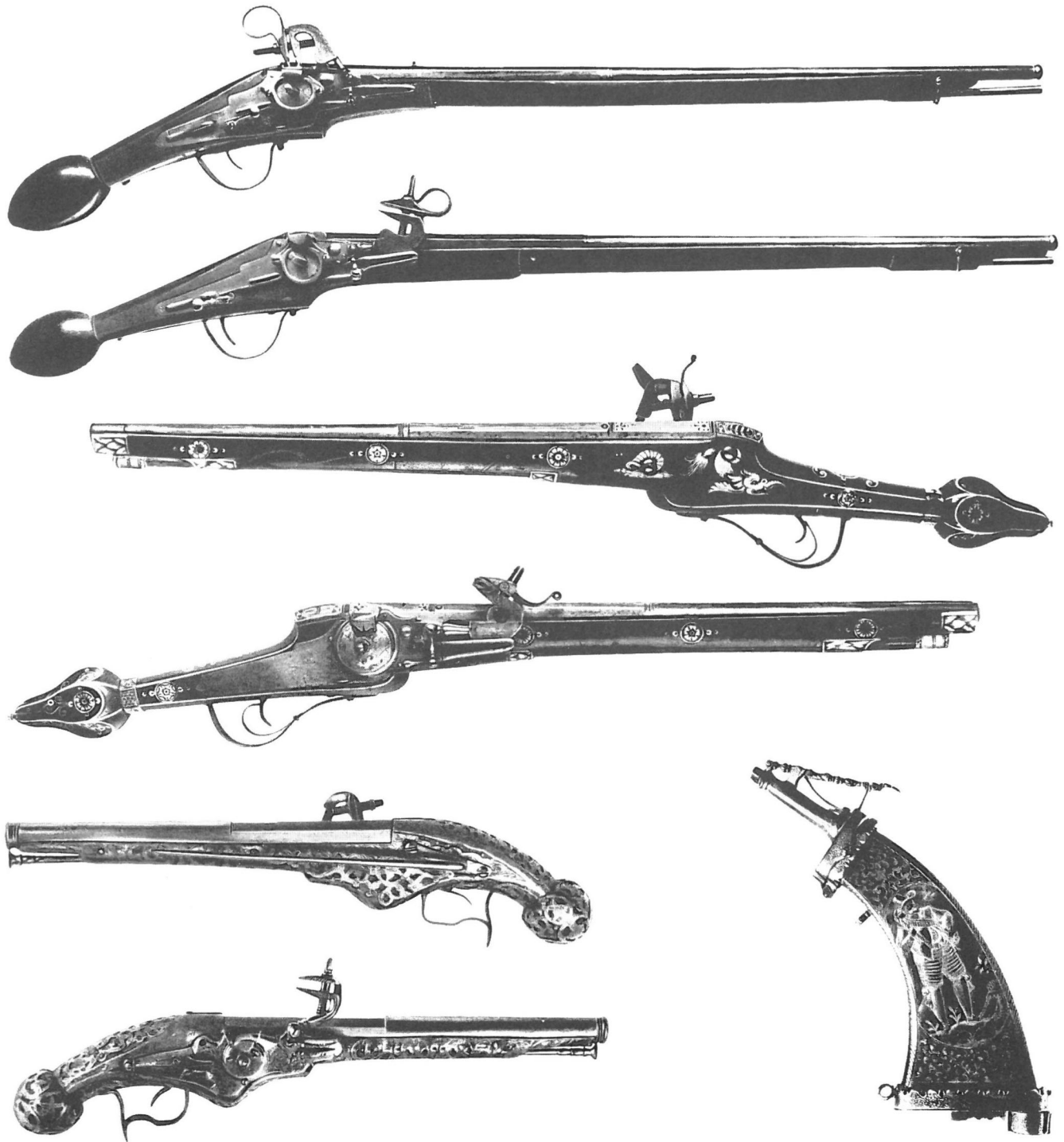


Figure 7. Top: Pair of wheel-lock holster pistols. Unusually long barrels dated 1602, stamped with the marks of the town of Suhl (cf. Stöckel 1654, 1698) and the gunmaker's mark of Valentin Klett (Stöckel 598). On the lock the proof marks of the town of Suhl (cf. Stöckel 1672) and one unidentified mark (S on an anchor?). L 890 and 875/658 and 647, C 8.5. German, Suhl, dated 1602. 3.0. Nos. 5372, 5373. Middle: Pair of wheel-lock holster pistols. The barrels chiselled and struck with the marks: a man's figure with a fleur-de-lis between the letter CP (Stöckel 2278) and of the maker Zacharias Herold (Stöckel 518) Wheel covers and butt mounts of engraved gilt brass. The stocks inlaid with engraved stag horn. On the butts the coats-of-arms of

Saxony and Merseburg as also the monogram HF (Stöckel 379), probably the stockmaker's mark of Hans Fleischer. L 737 and 742/481, C 14.2. German, Dresden, about 1610-1620. 3.0. No. 28.

Lower: Pair of wheel-lock belt pistols. The barrels and locks engraved. The stocks overlaid with foils in silvered copper with tracery and engraving L 341/223, C 12.5. Spanish, Ripoll (Catalonia), about 1610-1630. 3.0. Nos. 5650, 5949.

Right: Powder horn, decorated with engraving. In the lower part of the body a receptacle for bullets. The bottom and cover of steel embellished with chiselling, engraving and gilt. On the left a belt hook of blued steel. German, about 1630. 3.0. No. 512.

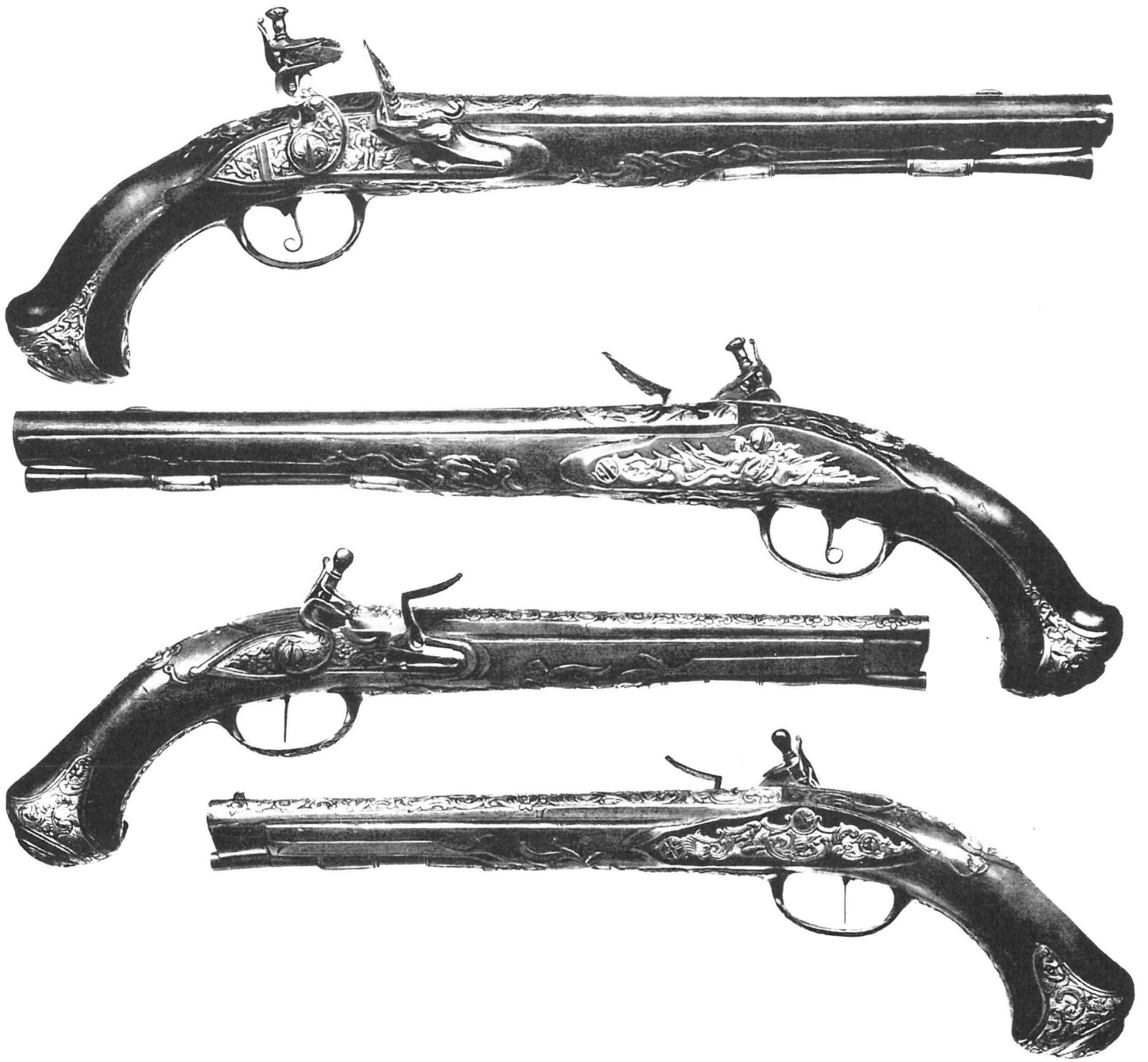


Figure 8. Top: Pair of flint-lock holster pistols of the Empress Elisaveta Petrovna. The barrels and steel furniture enriched with chiselling against a gilded ground and damascened with gold in relief. On the underside of each barrel, the proof-mark P. The locks engraved and chiselled, the lock-plates inscribed "THULA 1754". The stocks carved and inlaid with silver figures and wire. On the butts the Empress' escutcheons. L 516, 344, C 15. Russian, Tula, dated 1754. 3.0 Nos. 7066, 7067.  
 Bottom: Pair of children's pistols (working models) of the Grand Duke Constantine Pavlovitch. Stub twist barrels proof-marked P. The barrels, locks and steel furniture damascened with silver and gold. The lock plates inscribed Tula. The stocks inlaid with silver. L 185, C 8.5. Russian, Tula, about 1784. 3.0. Nos. 5445, 5449.



Figure 9. Pair of flint-lock breech-loading break-action pistols with reloadable steel chambers. The barrels and steel furniture damascened with gold. L 544/355, C 15.4. West European (the Netherlands?) about 1710-1720. 3.O. No. 5757.

Warsaw makers in the second half of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. British gun production of the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries is represented by a number of fine quality pieces, which were manufactured by distinguished London gunsmiths, and a group of original Scottish pistols.

As to Spanish weapons, the pieces of Madrid make are best represented, but there is also a group of distinctive items from Ripoll and other towns. Quite a number of fascinating specimens is found among the Danish, Swedish and Swiss firearms.

Most remarkable in the section of American firearms are the Colt rifles and revolvers, the majority of these being skillfully decorated presentation specimens given by S. Colt to Nicholas I, Alexander II and his brothers.

A common feature of all sections comprising the Hermitage collection is a low proportion of mass produced army weapons. This is true, too, for the firearms of which ninety percent are piece-work items of high artistic, historical and technological value as well as of memorial interest. The materials of the collection are little known to the broad circles of arms researchers and amateurs despite these merits. Of the many uncommon specimens of European and American firearms in the Hermitage collection, the most remarkable items of particular interest for Soviet and foreign historians and collectors were selected for this book, with due consideration given primarily for their artistic and memorial value, typological rarity and design features. Finally, the author did his best to represent all major groups of European and American firearms collected in the Hermitage.

The great majority of the materials included in this book have never been published before, but, regardless of this, all items to be reproduced were disassembled and thoroughly examined which made it possible, in quite a number of cases, to reveal inscriptions, marks and dates on them for the first time.

For more detailed information on the history and composition of the Hermitage arms collections, see: L. Tarassuk. *The Collection of Arms and Armour in the State Hermitage, Leningrad. Introduction and Part I. The Journal of the Arms and Armour Society*, vol. III, No. 1 (London, March 1959); Part II, *ibid.*, vol. 5, Nos. 4-5 (March 1966). A bibliography on the subject is presented in this publication.

The greatest amount of valuable data on arms and armour in the Hermitage collections including firearms is contained in two works by E. E. Lenz. *The Imperial Hermitage. Guide to the Medieval and Renaissance Department. Part I: The Collection of Arms and Armour*. Petersburg, 1908, with an album of photographs supplementing the above guide - *Die Waffensammlung des Grafen S. D. Scheremetew in St. Petersburg*. Leipzig, 1897.