

A UNIQUELY ENGRAVED DETACHED WHEEL-LOCK BY VIENNESE MASTER GUN-MAKER CASPAR ZELLNER

by Michael Samuels



The maker, his creations, and his customers

Caspar Zellner was born on 31 December 1661 in Zell am Wallersee, which was situated within the Holy Roman Empire and is just a day's walk to the northeast of the city of Salzburg (Zell and Salzburg are in present-day Austria). His birth placed him in the fourth of eight generations of Zellner men engaged in the manufacture of firearms (see Appendix 1). His great-grandfather, Hans (noted in records in 1524), forged gun barrels in Zell am Wallersee. Caspar's grandfather, Georg (activity noted in records from 1594 until 1634), was noted as a "Maker" of firearms in the Urbargut in Zell am Wallersee and was specifically noted for his manufacture and delivery of arms to the lifeguard (army) of Prince-Archbishop Wolf Dietrich von Raitenau (reigned 1587-1612) in the Castle Hohensalzburg. The Prince-Archbishop was both the secular and ecclesiastical ruler of his territories—the archbishopric. Interestingly, Georg Zellner is the first of the Zellner family documented as residing in this Urbargut at Zell am Wallersee. An Urbargut is a peasant estate that is under the manorial lordship of, usually, a Duke. But, in this case, the Archbishopric of Salzburg, which was ruled by Georg's big customer Archbishop von Raitenau, administered this Urbargut.

Two of Georg's three sons became gun-makers (the third became involved in the Catholic Church). One son, Kilian, ultimately achieved recognition as a "Master Gun-maker". Most of the four gun-makers that followed in Kilian's ancestral lineage of the Zellner family also became "Master Gun-makers". Georg's other son, Johann, who was born in 1610, and worked as a gun-maker in Zell am Wallersee, where he died in 1680, was recognized by the Salz-

burg Guild as a "Gun-maker". About half of Johann's descendants achieved "Master Gun-maker" status (see Appendix 1 – The Zellner Dynasty of Gun-makers).

When Caspar was born in 1661, his father, Johann, was already quite old and firmly established in business. Caspar worked and studied in his father's workshop in Zell am Wallersee until he was sixteen years old, at which point he went to work for his uncle, Kilian Zellner, who was at a mature age and a "Master Gun-maker" in Salzburg. Prior to Killian Zellner's arrival in Salzburg in 1673, he worked and improved his craft as a "Maker" in Vienna. Politically, Vienna was a part of the Habsburg Empire. Geographically, it is about 290 kilometers east of Salzburg. As stated previously, Salzburg was politically a part of the Holy Roman Empire. Both empires were governed separately, but, at this time, both were ruled by the Habsburg Emperor as the Holy Roman Emperor – Leopold I (1640-1705). Why Kilian Zellner moved back, closer to his ancestral roots in Zell am Wallersee, to Salzburg at such a late point in his life – a great business opportunity, or a commitment to training and further advancing a brother's son, Caspar, in the family business – we will probably never know.

It is in Salzburg that Killian was appointed to the position of gun-maker to the Prince-Archbishop Max Gandolph Graf Kuenburg (reigned 1668-1687). Almost concurrently, Killian was recognized as a "Master Gun-maker" by the Gun-makers Guild of Salzburg. This new professional position and this new Guild status allowed Killian Zellner access to the rarified market of high-status clients in the Salzburg Archbishopric. The Archbishopric, in ways similar to the high society of Vienna, had a history of attracting

exceptionally skilled gun-makers with great opportunities to create lavish firearms and to work with other skilled master-craftsmen such as gun-stockers. Salzburg remained a city attracting outstanding gun-makers until the mid-18th Century when its status began to wane as the Archbishopric of Salzburg was eliminated and secularized in 1803.

It is into this higher-class environment of the Salzburg Archbishopric, from the rural area of the Urbargut in Zell am Wallersee, that Caspar Zellner moved in 1677. Uncle Killian's shop, now established for a few years in Salzburg, produced high-end firearms custom-made for, and commissioned by, wealthy individuals. Caspar worked for and learned from his uncle until 1680. Then, for the ten years after 1680, Caspar worked in Salzburg, but the details of his work are unknown. It is known that in 1690 he had moved to Vienna and was officially inducted into the Viennese Gun-maker's Guild as a Gun-maker. His uncle, Kilian, died shortly after in 1693. Vienna was the heart of the Habsburg Empire, and it had eclipsed Salzburg as the place for a rapidly-rising highly-skilled craftsman to establish himself. In 1692 Caspar made application (Figure 1) to the Viennese Guild of Master Gun-makers and Gun-Stockers to become a "Master Gun-maker". The Guild application verified Caspar's credentials of birth and study, and it initiated a two-year interval over which he was to produce an example of his work to submit to the Guild for judgement. This sample work was required to demonstrate the applicant's skills in everything needed to produce a firearm, including the engraving of the lock plate, but excluding the carving and inlaying of the stock, which was the job of a Guild-recognized stocker. Caspar Zellner presented his sample work to the Guild and was recognized as a "Master Gun-maker" by the Viennese Guild of Master Gun-makers and Gun-stockers on 15 May 1695.

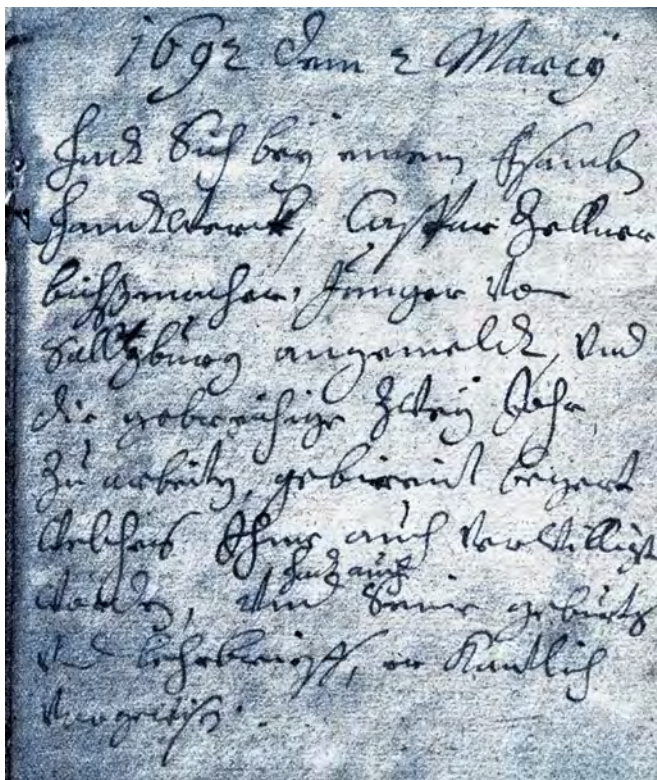


Figure 1. Caspar Zellner's application of 2 March 1692 to the Viennese Guild of Master Gun-makers and Gun-stockers to produce an example of his work within two years' time to be recognized as a Master Gun-maker by the Guild.

The rise of Caspar Zellner in the custom gun-making market of Vienna was meteoric. He spent the rest of his life, having no children of record and dying in 1745, producing exquisite firearms. He rapidly became one of the primary gun-makers for the Habsburg royal court, who had a keen interest in firearms. In the Habsburg Imperial Hofgewehrhammer (the Imperial Gun Room now located in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna), there are 95 firearms marked and attributed to Caspar Zellner. Firearms produced for the royal court and other select customers were for three major purposes – hunting, target shooting and status. In Zellner's time, the Habsburg Emperor Leopold I and his two sons Joseph I and Karl VI passionately enjoyed hunting and shooting, while the ladies of the court engaged in the civilized sport of leisurely target shooting. Both wheel and flint-locks were used for hunting, and each had its advantages and disadvantages, but wheel-locks were preferred for target shooting, and were considered to have a more-reliable ignition system. Both Leopold I and Karl VI were near-sighted and required custom optical corrective sights for their guns. Caspar Zellner was one of four noted gun-makers who produced firearms for the royal court. For a person of status in Vienna, being eligible to purchase a bespoke and custom firearm produced by Caspar Zellner fulfilled the third purpose of possessing such a firearm – status. Not everyone who could even afford a Zellner gun was eligible to purchase a custom-made Zellner gun. The person commissioning a Zellner creation had to be a person of high status in breeding and/or accomplishment.

The unique customer and the unusually engraved lock

The overwhelming body of Caspar Zellner's work can be characterized by the customers for whom he created those firearms. He made mostly long-guns that were almost exclusively meant for the leisurely pursuits of the rich – hunting and target shooting. Some of these beautiful firearms may have been meant to have defensive functions... while allowing their owner to look good. As a result, the overwhelming majority of these firearms are embellished with lock engravings depicting a limited number of basic themes – scenes of hunting; mythological or allegorical scenes; abstract geometrical or floral designs or (in smaller numbers) scenes associated with war, siege and victory. These scenes were custom engraved for the person commissioning the work, and probably reflected that person's worldly interests and values. As status symbols, these engraved firearms are meant to represent the values of their proud, lucky-to-own-a-Caspar Zellner, owners.

A Caspar Zellner wheel-lock plate engraved with an unusual scene prompts some speculation concerning the lock's commissioning owner and his socio-economic status. Such an owner would have been a unique customer as there are few to no such examples. Such a unique commissioning customer would have been the original owner of the subject lock of this article. Produced in about 1720, this wheel-lock's engraved plate (see header image) would have been commissioned at the height of Caspar Zellner's status as a Viennese Master Gun-maker. Zellner would have limited his customers to only those of high status and wealth. Working with the wrong customer might have potentially damaged Zellner's perceived status and was therefore of utmost importance.

By observing the subject lock's engraved scene (Figure 2), a person might speculate that the lock's original owner was somehow associated with international commerce – import/export, buy/sell, etc. The wheel-lock plate is engraved thusly:



Figure 1. Caspar Zellner's application of 2 March 1692 to the Viennese Guild of Master Gun-makers and Gun-stockers to produced an example of his work within two years' time to be recognized as a Master Gun-maker by the Guild.

The focal point of the engraved scene is two men standing – one gentleman, the guest, dressed in the European-style and wearing a short sword under his waistcoat visiting the other gentleman who is standing in the stone doorway of a wealthy house and is wearing a bejeweled turban, in the Ottoman style, and a waist sash, in which he has tucked a large pistol – both men are gesturing and conversing. To their left, a laborer carries a sack of some com-

modity up a hill from a large sea-traveling sailing vessel floating in the middle-ground. The vessel is docked in a harbor and is flying a flag of nationality. The ship has a clearly illustrated ramp over which trade goods are to be loaded and/or unloaded – import and export. The harbor is walled and in the distant background the sun is just beginning to rise above the horizon, signaling the start and promise of a new day.



Figure 3. Observed barrel markings of Caspar Zellner.





Figure 4. Caspar Zellner's mark as engraver found on the engraved subject lock plate.

This scene, and the fact that Zellner accepted the commission, strongly suggests that the individual commissioning this work was a wealthy Viennese trader who utilized trading partners in the East... very possibly the Ottoman Empire. By 1720, the approx-

imate date of the making of this lock, the Habsburg monarchy in Vienna and the Ottoman Empire had recently concluded the Austro-Turkish War (1716 to 1718). Vienna had survived a siege by the Ottoman forces. Being very pragmatic when it came to commerce and the acquisition of wealth, Vienna began trading with the Ottoman Empire almost immediately after the conclusion of hostilities. After all, the Ottomans had many luxury goods to offer Vienna, including silks from the East, and the all-important commodity required in Vienna – Turkish coffee.

The subject detached lock was at some point in history removed from a complete long-arm marked with Caspar Zellner's maker's marks on the breech end of the barrel. He would probably have utilized his mark depicting a tent or a crown over his name "CASP" / "ZEL" / "NER", and his mark of either a stag or a dog (Figure 3). Caspar Zellner had several variations of spelling to his name and several variations to his maker's mark. The barrel would also have had his name spelled out in golden lettering. The lock itself was not typically marked by the gun-maker, but it was occasionally marked by the engraver of the lock plate. Fortunately, Caspar Zellner engraved this lock and placed his maker's mark – "C.Z." (Figure 4). There are other examples of his work similarly marked, but none, known to this author, decorated with this theme of commerce.

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The Zellner Dynasty of Gun-makers

