

Guns from Central Europe with lock «a la Catalana»

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Arms provided with «snaphance» and flintlock have been used for almost three centuries in Europe and therefore they have earned an imortat and firm position in the history of firearms. The first reports describing «snaphance» in Italy and Sweden date from the early 16th century and by the second half of that century «snaphance» was well known throughout all of Europe from Spain to Russia and from Italy to Scandinavia. Many variants and styles have emerged, e.g. the Dutch, English, Swedish type of lock differing in the position of main the spring, and in steel and pan-cover being composed either of two components or forming a single member and also in some other details. The masterpiece of this development was a flintlock designed in France at the beginning of the 17th century which spread throughout Europe during the 17th century and superseded all other variants almost entirely. Its only competitor until the end of the flintlock arms era was the Lock à la Catalana, also called Spanish lock, miquelet or patilla.

The origin of Lock à la Catalana is Spanish; this lock is characterised by having its main spring on the outer side of the lockplate, acting upwards on the heel of the cock. Its steel and pan cover are joined together making up a single component.

Locks à la Catalana have been used up to the 19th century not only in Spain but also in Portugal and Italy, particularly in southern Italy. They were common in the entire Mediterranean area and we often find them on Oriental arms including the guns and pistols from the Balkan states and North Africa. In Europe Locks à la Catalana have been limited to the Mediterranean region. Arne Hoff in his excellent book about firearms (*Feuerwaffen I.*, 1969, p. 242) wrote that Lock à la Catalana never spread

(*) Military Museum, Prague, Czech Republic.

northwards from the Mediterranean region and the only exceptions are the gun with a typical Spanish lock manufactured by Caspar Zelner in Vienna (in Detmold Castle Armoury) and another one made by Mathias Pfensack in Konisberg (in Tojhusmuseet).

Arne Hoff's opinion that these arms have been produced only on special order of the customer, is undoubtedly correct but nevertheless the number of Locks à la Catalana manufactured in Central Europe is a little bit larger. Obviously the main reason is a close connection between the Habsburg state in Central Europe with Spain which was also ruled by Habsburg during the 16th and 17th century. There have been numerous marriages between the nobility from Spain and Austria or Bohemia. Many aristocrats living in Bohemia—Pernstein, Lobkowics, Eggenberg, Gallas, Buquoy, Piccolomini and others, spoke and wrote Spanish. Officers, tradesmen, and clergymen from Spain lived in Prague and possibly these customers ordered arms from local gunmakers with a type of lock which they had been accustomed to use in their homes.

Perhaps most of you know that in one of the Prague churches a famous statue of the Christ Child (El Niño Jesús de Praga) is exhibited. This statue was brought from Spain by Maria Manrique de Lara who married Wratislav of Pernstein in 1556. The history of this statue is well known but unfortunately the names of those who ordered firearms with Lock à la Catalana in Prague or in Vienna still remains a mystery. We know only the gunmakers who produced these arms and signed them with their names.

Arne Hoff described in his book a gun with Lock à la Catalana from Caspar Zelner who was a master gunmaker in Vienna in 1695. The same gunmaker produced two Locks à la catalana now in the collections of the Military Museum in Prague (Fig. 1, 2). In the same museum are two Locks à la Catalana signed only «In Prag»; the name of the gunmaker appears on the barrel only (Fig. 3, 4). The Military Museum in Prague also has another hunting gun with Lock à la Catalana signed by Prague gunmaker Caspar Neireitter, dated 1673 and later rebuilt in the 19th century with a percussion system (Fig. 5). A separate Lock à la Catalana manufactured by Caspar Neireitter is in the collection of the National Museum in Prague (Fig 6).

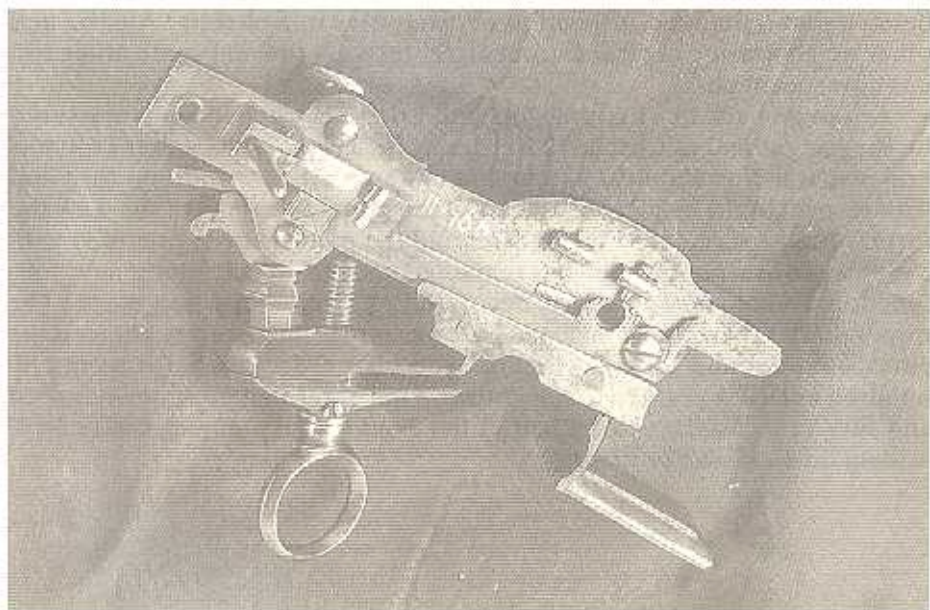
Neireitter's gun which is now in the Military Museum in Prague was formerly, in the armoury Frydlant Castle in Northern Bohemia. The collection of this castle also includes a pair of pistols with Lock à la Catalana from Johann Stifter, Prague gunmaker of the 17th century. Frydlant Castle was owned among others by Albrecht of Waldstein and after his death the castle was owned by Mathias Gallas. Gallas served with Spanish troops just before the Thirty Years' War and in 1635 obtained as a gift from the Spanish king an estate in Southern Italy which was a region where arms with Lock à la Catalana were common.

Johan Stifter was a well known gunmaker and many arms produced by him have survived up to the present time. On the other hand, Franz Faidirl

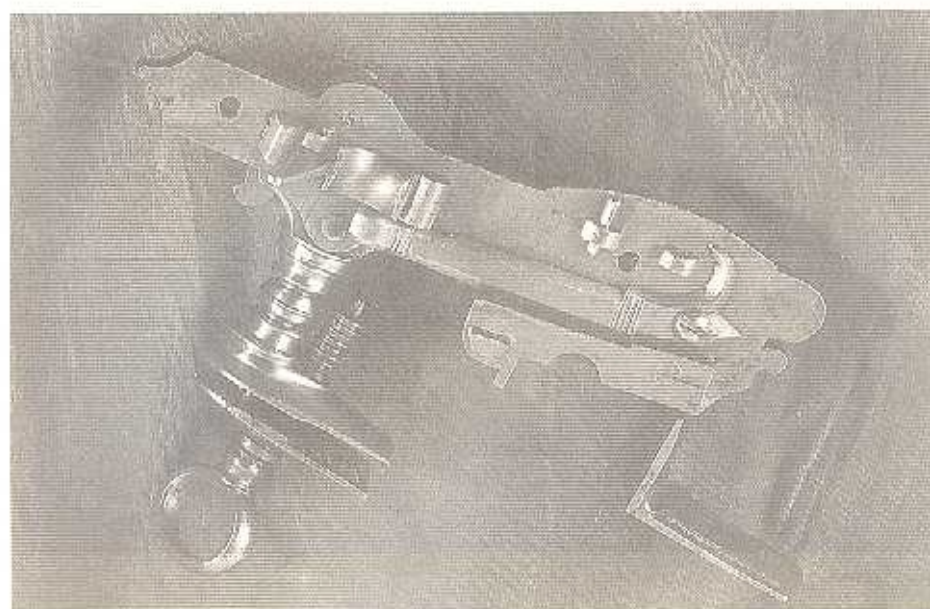
from Brno remains quite an unknown person; Mnichovo Hradiste Castle in Bohemia preserves his rifle with break down action and with Lock à la Catalana. An arm with the same system, and also with Lock à la Catalana produced by gunmaker Franz Jeiedtel in Vienna in the second half of the 17th century, is in Tojhusmuseet in Copenhagen. Hluboka Castle in South Bohemia has a hunting rifle with Lock à la Catalana in its armoury. It was manufactured by gunmaker Johann Waas in Vienna at the end of 17th and beginning of the 18th century. Frydlant Castle houses a hunting gun unsigned by the gunmaker from the beginning of 18th century, with the cost of arms of the possessors, the family von Dietrichstein. The lock of this arms is a combination of Frech flintlock and Lock à la Catalana with corresponding shape of grooved steel, jaws of cock, etc.

Spanish influence on Czech and Austrian gunmaking are also found in other areas. Very popular have been high quality Spain barrels which may be found in arms manufactured by many gunmakers from Central Europe. *Some Czech gunmaker in the 18th century such as the gunmakers in Austria and some other countries-* assumed a Spanish style of signing the barrels by the master craftsman. Some arms e.g. made by Leopold becher from Karlovy Vary (Karlsbad) are provided with Madrid stock. In this presentation, however, we have concentrated only on Locks à la Catalana produced by gunmakers in Central Europe. These arms are scarce and therefore each piece remains a rarity for the collector. On the other hand these arms are not so rare and exceptional as presumed in the literature. I believe that a detailed inspection of armouries in Bohemia, Austria and other neighbouring central European States might reveal some other still unknown specimens.

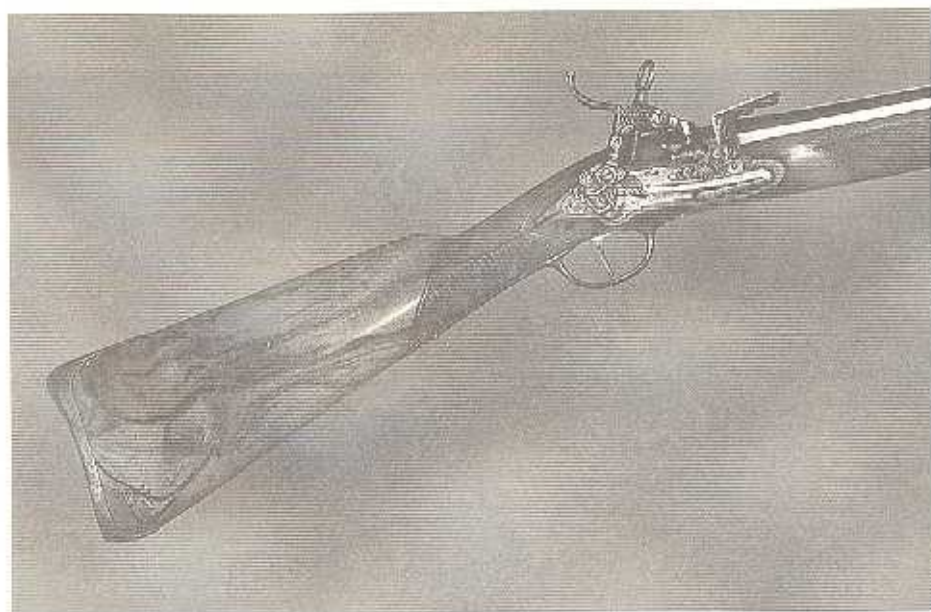
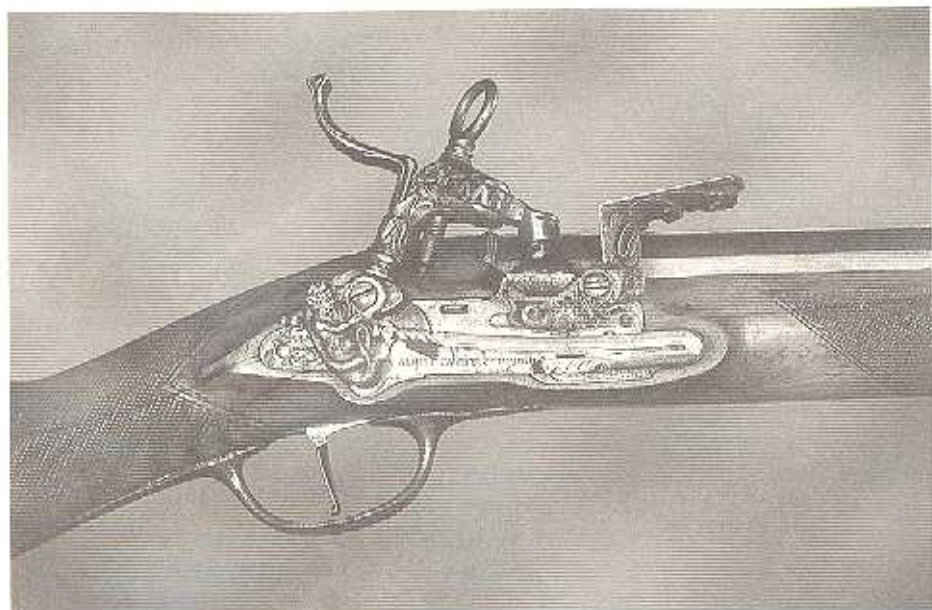
Let us go back to a hunting gun with Lock à la Catalana manufactured by Prague gunmaker Caspar Neireitter in 1673 (Fig. 7). At about 1830 this arm was transformed into percussion system -with exceptional care and with respect to the original character of the arm. In the jaws of the cock the former flint was replaced by hammer and the pan has been provided with a nipple. The rest of the lock has remained unchanged, including now non-functional steel and pan-cover, decorated by a relief of a new stock. The owner at that therefore converted his arms for further use. He allowed the parts —barrel and lock— which served his predecessors for over one hundred and fifty years to remain intact. God grant that after one hundred and fifty years, in the second half of the 22nd century, our successors will esteem our work in like manner.



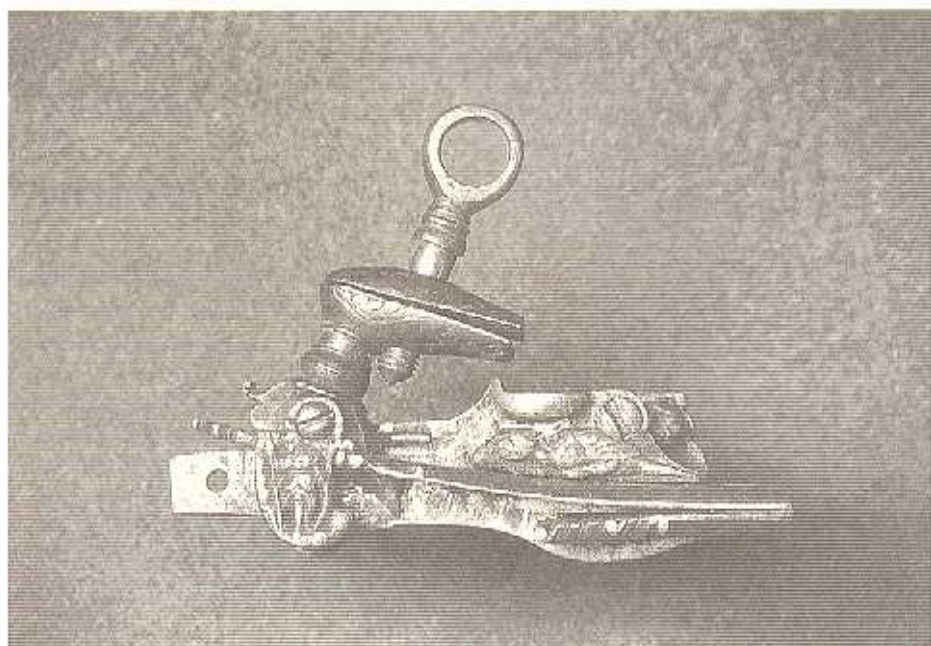
Photos 1 and 2.—*Platř of locks a la Catalana, Caspar Zeiner, Vienna.*



Photos 3 and 4. *Pair of locks à la Catalana, signed «La Prag».*



Photos 5 and 7.—*Gun with lock a la Cavalana, Caspar Neireiner. Prague, 1673, c. 1830 transformed.*



Photos 6. *Lock a la Catalana, Caspar Neiveitter, Prague (steel and pan cover missing).*