

## PORTABLE WEAPONS PRODUCTION IN SPAIN

During the XVIII century, firearms in Spain, with the only exception of the Madrid arquebusiers who had been liberated in 1710 of all ties to the Guilds by Philip V<sup>1</sup> were manufactured by the four Guilds of craftsmen that functioned in each “factory,” which included the barrel makers, the lock makers, the gun stockers and the finishers; Only those craftsmen with the rank of “master” could work on that part of the weapon of their competence.

Those geographical areas where the manufacturers were concentrated were called “factories”, and, “Royal Factories” if they manufactured the King’s arms; Those arms paid for by the Royal Purse were inspected by the “King’s examiners” who had to certify by their personal markings that each weapon had passed the proof and the regulation “visual” inspection; In contrast, for those weapons made for “private” parties the maker’s markings on the barrel and lock were deemed to be sufficient guarantee.

In the early XIX century there were “Royal” firearms factories in Placencia, Cataluña, and Oviedo; The Placencia factory employed artisans from the towns close to the Deva river and had its reception centers in the towns of Placencia (Soraluce) and Eibar; That of Oviedo (in Asturias) had its Guilds in Oviedo itself and in neighboring Trubia, and that of Cataluña, by then practically ruined, had its Guilds in Ripoll and Barcelona.

The first person to be recognized in Spain as a “manufacturer” of edged weapons and firearms was Gabriel Benito de Ibarzabal of Eibar; His edged weapons were made in his own workshop but the firearms, judging by the markings on locks and barrels, were privately subcontracted by him to the Placencia guilds.

Ibarzabal started as a “manufacturer” of firearms immediately after the Cortes made it possible in May of 1820, and his “factory” survived the derogation of the Cortes decrees in 1823.

The coming of the industrial freedoms in 1836 caused no changes in the production of army issue weapons at the Oviedo and Placencia factories which continued to function on the Guild system, which was not dissolved until 1858 when the artisans were hired directly as workmen by the Artillery Corps, while the Royal Placencia Factories were closed in January of 1865.

The different destiny of both factories was due to the fact that the Oviedo Factory was property of the State, having been created in 1794 and paid for by the Royal Purse, and that it was modernized in 1844 by Officers of the Artillery Corps, while in Placencia the only State property was the “*Errege-etxea*”, the King’s House, where the Guild masters brought their production to be inspected by the “King’s examiners”; Its workshops, disseminated along the Deva river were the property of the Guild members

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<sup>1</sup> According to Isidro Soler in his “Compendio Histórico de los Arcabuceros de Madrid” (Historical Compendium of the Madrid Arquebusiers)

and it was the Guilds who imposed their prices and conditions on the Army and Navy contracts.

During the 1850s a number of firms came into being which were interested in producing the modern issue armaments required by the Army including, in Placencia, the so called “*Euscalduna*” which was a modern factory owned by the “Zuazubizcar, Isla y Comp<sup>a</sup>” firm.

As far as commercial arms production it was around 1836 that the classic individual masters markings, applied to (by then percussion) pistols and shotguns began to be substituted by a single barrel inscription which pronounced them the product of a certain maker or factory, usually from Eibar.



**Eibar made “commercial” pistol; 193 mm long, 18 mm bore, forged barrel bearing a silver inscription on its handle: “Fabricado / Por Jose Ramon Bustinduy / Año 1840”, with octagonal chamber, mounted in the English style; Lock with chain, inscribed “En Eybar”; Full stock and engraved iron furnishings.**

In his “Viaje al País de los Recuerdos”<sup>2</sup>, Toribio Echevarria tells us that “In those times it was the Manchester school that was in vogue and it was in that spirit that the so called “*Montadores*” appeared; These “*Montadores*” (assemblers, literally), who were also businessmen, obtained the orders, from within Spain and abroad, and had them filled by the master craftsmen who worked their specialties independently in their own shops, and these successive assembly operations, hence the name “*Montadores*”, produced the complete weapon, ready to be marketed; Those who succeeded in this type of enterprise gradually began to unite the different specialists under one roof, under one boss, and became a factory”.

The first “*Montador*” was Gabriel Benito de Ibarzabal, followed by all those who put their name in weapons they marketed, including his son Ignacio Ibarzabal who in 1852 inherited his father’s factory, and also the Orbea brothers who founded their own in 1860; From this date until 1873 these were the only “factories” in Eibar and, after the end of the Civil War, “Orbea Hermanos” was the only remaining one until 1897, when the workshop of “Garate, Anitua y Cia” started to be classified as a factory (by the tax collector).

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<sup>2</sup> Travel to the Country of Memories

It was in the manufacture of “fine hunting arms” that mastery of the craft was required, because, as noted by Echeverria: “in the field of handguns less personal professional skills were necessary as machines were introduced very early in their manufacture and their use became generalized faster”, even though the machinery available to these workshops at the time probably did not allow for a very high quality product.

Toribio Echevarria used to tell of a house in Eibar where Ignacio Galarraga, who was a Socialist, had his shop in the first floor, while at the same time two brothers who were furious Carlists (monarchist followers of the Carlist pretender) worked in the attic making “*cachorrillos*”, cheap pistols that were sent to Constantinople and distributed throughout the Middle East; Not only was this cohabitation of two so diametrically opposed political philosophies a common occurrence in those times, but also frequent was the presence of several different workshops functioning in the same house, where many of them were also engaged in producing cheap pistols which the “*Montadores*” then marketed inside Spain and also exported to Turkey, the Balkan countries, Mexico and South America.