

ARMAMENTS OF THE TROOPS OF THE ROYAL HOUSEHOLD, 1788-1931
 (41)
 1ST SUPPLEMENT
 PRE-1788 PRODUCTION

(Translation by Hector J. Meruelo)



Cavalry pistols made at the Catalonia Factory; The upper one with a 354 mm long, “de a 23” (15.8 mm) caliber barrel lacking any markings; The lower one with a 305 mm long, “de a 19” (17 mm) caliber barrel marked “AS/COT” (unidentified) inscribed “R. C. GUAR. DEL CUERPO DEL REY”; French-style locks, early, “unimproved”, flash pan variant, the upper one lacking any markings, the lower one inscribed “MAS/DEV” (Eudald Masdeu, 1759-1768); Iron fittings; Robert E. Brooker collection.

Most of the troops of the Royal Household that I have referred to in the previous 40 Chapters began their existence during Felipe V's reign (1700-1746); The reason I decided not to start this work at the time of their creation is that, prior to 1788, I know of no weapons that can be identified as having been equipment of troops of the Royal Household, with very few exceptions such as a few pistols for the "Guardias de Corps" made at the Catalonia Factory; I know of no specimens made at the Royal Placencia Factory prior to 1788.

In 1734 the "Real Compañía Guipuzcoana de Caracas de las Indias" (Royal Guipuzcoan Company of Caracas of the Indies), whose business consisted mainly of cocoa importation, was designated as general purveyor; In 1747 Fernando VI decided not to renew the agreement with this Company and its "asiento" (contract) was granted to a combine of gun makers headed by Juan José de Iraola; At the same time the Guilds were authorized to manufacture not only those arms for Royal Service related to the "King's contract", but also other arms contracted by "private" parties.

This last decision turned out to be not beneficial to the Crown's interests, since the "private" contracts were more profitable to the artisans and, if the opportunity arose, they would interrupt the construction of the items ordered by the King's contract; The unavoidable delays in their delivery caused the suspension of the "asiento" in 1753, which was then again offered to the "Real Compañía Guipuzcoana de Caracas"; It was accepted, with the condition of being able to force the Guilds to work exclusively for it in the construction of those items related to the "King's contract"; This Company kept its status as general Purveyor until the end of its existence in 1784 when it was assumed by its successor, the "Real Compañía de Filipinas" (Royal Company of the Philippines).

This last Company maintained this purveyorship until 1794 when Placencia was occupied by the French during the War against the Convention; In 1796, the Royal Placencia Factory being restored, Carlos IV decreed that the production in this Factory, as in the new Royal Oviedo Factory (founded 1794), would be administered by the Directors of the Factory, with well punctuated agreements with the Guilds, imposing on them prices and conditions.

I have no information on the armaments included in the 1734 contract, but in the 1747 contract the arms were said to be "like those made during the preceding contract with the "Compañía de Caracas"; Regarding arms for the troops of the Royal Household in the 1747 contract, these were: "the musket for Infantry Guards with spare pan cover /...../ and engraved on the barrel, by sharp-pointed burin, the Royal Arms and whatever lettering is customary", at a price of 71 Reales and 17 Maravedies (the infantry musket at a price of 50 Rs. and 17 Mrs.) and, a pair of pistols for the "Guardias de Corps", bearing "the usual lettering on their barrels" at a price of 95 Rs. each pair (while a pair of pistols for the Cavalry had a price of 66 Rs.).

In the transcription of this document in my possession any mention or price for the carbine for "Guardias de Corps" has been omitted by error but the statement "engraved by sharp-pointed burin on the barrel the Royal Arms and whatever lettering is customary", pertains to the carbine and not the musket; Therefore I do not know what the price was for the carbine for "Guardias de Corps" but that for the regular Cavalry carbine was 47 Rs.

In the 1753 contract with the “Real Compañía Guipuzcoana de Caracas” the following are detailed: “musket for Guards with its bayonet and with spare pan cover, 72 RS (the regular Infantry musket went for 65 Rs); Each carbine for “Guardias de Corps” with spare pan cover, and, engraved by sharp-pointed burin, the Royal Arms and the customary lettering, 76 Rs (while the regular Cavalry carbine went for 58 Rs) and for 104 Rs each pair of pistols for “Guardias de Corps” with the usual lettering on their barrel (while a pair of pistols for the regular Cavalry costed 73 Rs); A discount of 5 Rs. will be made for each musket or carbine ordered without the spare pan cover”

The manufacture of arms in Catalonia was very different from that in the Royal Placencia Factory: In Catalonia there was no “general Purveyor” under obligation to deliver a minimum number of arms per year; The “asientos” (contracts) were well detailed, according to the number of arms required to equip a certain troop, and they were assigned by public auction, where different “societies of gun makers”, sited in Barcelona, bided; Once the auction was won, its beneficiary (“asentista”) sub-contracted the construction of the locks and barrels with the Ripoll Guilds, then assembled the arms in Barcelona and delivered them in “Atarazanas” where the “King’s Master” (examiner) accepted them, once shown to be in accordance to the “sample” model agreed upon in the auction, and, after passing the regulation proof firing.

After the fall of Barcelona (Nov-9-1714) edicts were proclaimed in Catalonia forbidding the use and possession of all types of arms, whether edged weapons or firearms, and also its manufacturing or re-composition, “under penalty of death, burning of the abode and confiscation of goods”; In the edict published on November, 12, 1714 the manufacturing of arms was (again) authorized but under the strict supervision of the authorities of the Principality; The artisans could only produce them if they were established in the cities or villages of Barcelona, Girona, Figueres, Vic, Olot, Ripoll, Manresa, Solsona, Seo de Urgel, Tremp, Lerida, Tortosa, Tarragona, Tárrega or Igualada; They could produce only arms destined to the “service of the King” such as those granted in public auction by the General Manager of the “Principality of Catalonia”.

Manufacturing for “private” parties was only possible when the arms to be made had special authorization given by the Captain General of Catalonia; This authorization was not hard to obtain by the so-called “commissioned Officers”, who were “commissioned” by their Regiment or Corp in order to contract the construction of “more refined arms” destined to equip the Officers of the contracting force.

These were most of the “private” parties who, between 1747 and 1753, were also requesting “more refined arms” from the Royal Placencia Factory, but who, upon the “Real Compañía Guipuzcoana de Caracas” being named “general Purveyor”, with the authority to force the Guilds to work exclusively for the “King’s contract”, had to direct themselves to the Catalonia Factory, the only one which could satisfy their request for arms not included in the “King’s contract”.

We can conclude from all of this that the carbines and pistols for “Guardias de Corps” included in the 1747 and 1753 contracts were those of the model which

equipped the Guards, and that those pistols made at the Catalonia Factory were destined to equip Officers.



Cavalry pistol of the model that equipped the Officers of the Royal Corp of “Guardias de Corps”, Catalonia Factory, circa 1750; 280 mm long , “de a 23” (16.4 mm) caliber barrel marked “CA / MS” (Eudald Camps, 1735-63), inscribed “GUARDIA DEL CUERPO DEL REY”; French-style lock, early “unimproved” flashpan variant, inscribed “ROVIRA” (Gaspar Rovira, 1747); Andres Barnes collection.

The rivalry between the different “societies of gun makers” which competed at the Barcelona auctions caused the so-called “suit of the fake arms”: Several gun makers denounced defects in the arms made by the “society” which won most of the auctions, starting an investigation which caused the suspension of further “contracts” being offered to the Catalonia Factory.

In 1782 a verdict was passed which absolved the defendant arms makers and punished the plaintiffs as being malicious, although this did not re-open again the contracting by auction in Catalonia; From 1773 on the Catalonia Factory ceased the production of regulation issue models and limited its activity to filling the demand from “private parties” (commissioned Officers) which was insufficient to maintain its production capacity.

In 1784, when the “Real Compañía de Filipinas” became the “general purveyor” of the Royal Placencia Factory , it had to renounce the privilege of forcing the Guilds to work exclusively producing arms for the “King’s contract”; We can conclude this from the specimens for troops of the Royal Household made there between 1788 and 1794, apparently contracted by commissioned Officers, bearing on their barrels the markings of the Guild Master under crown (while on regular issue arms we find only the Factory marking).

This diverted work from the Catalonia Factory; However, due to the imminent war with France in the early 1790’s, some of the arms needed to equip the troops levied by different personalities and corporations in order to help Carlos IV, were made there; Among these were the muskets that equipped the Companies of “Cazadores-Artilleros” (Artillery-Chasseurs or Jaegers) financed by the Duke of Osuna (illustrated in Chapter 6).

During the course of the war, Ripoll was sacked and burned by the French from the 11th to the 19th of June of 1794; This city was the main producer of locks and barrels for the Catalonia Factory, and even though Ripoll was said to have been completely rebuilt by 1796, by that date the production of the Placencia and Oviedo Factories was sufficient to satisfy the needs of the Army, and the decadence of the Catalonia Factory accelerated until its practical disappearance during the War 1808-1813.

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