

**MINIATURE WHEEL-LOCK PISTOL**  
**CIRCA 1600**





**A Fine and Rare Miniature Wheel-lock Pistol, Attributed to Michel Mann, Nuremberg, Late 16th Century.**

Length overall: ca. 5,5 cm (2.17 inches). Barrel: 3,4 cm (1.34 inches).

**Provenance**

I. H. Furmage, 1928.

II. William Randolph Hearst, New York. Until 1939.

III. Private Collection USA.

The barrel blank, in the front half of round cross section, towards the breech angular. Both areas are separated from each other by decorative chamfers that are repeated at the rear end. There are two loops at the middle of the barrel and the breech for the attachment of a suspension chain.

The flat lock plate covers the stock. It still retains its original blueing and shows an ornament plate of gilded copper, attached by a screw. Towards the butt it is decorated by two chamfers at the end. Flat wheel cover of steel, inserted into a circular container that has two swellings at the upper part of the edge as a decoration. Pan and pan cover are also made of copper, gilded and engraved. Cock skilfully cut from steel and engraved, the upper lip movable and fastened firmly by a screw. The trigger straight, passing through the rectangular trigger guard.

On the stock that is made of fire gilded copper you can find scrollwork, engraved in the manner typical for Michel Mann (active 1590 – 1630). The upper side shows a herringbone pattern which is repeated cut in half lengthwise on the underside, thus like a row of rhomboids. Following an S - shape the butt is asymmetrically formed, since its upper part thickens resembling a leaf, while the opposite side swings out with a constant thickness of the copper plate. There is a further loop on the upper end of the stock, so a suspension chain can hold the pistol on three points overall.

**Condition**

The fire gilding is partly rubbed, especially at the butt and at the wheel cover. It is very positive that the original blueing of the lock plate is still preserved, which has decayed at the vast majority of the comparable examples. You can find tiny traces of corrosion at the iron parts that

do correspond to the age of the object as do the signs of wear and usage. Ramrod and trigger guard are replaced.

## Background

Concerning the origin and use of miniature wheel-lock pistols there are several hypotheses under discussion. On the one hand it is supposed these objects were created by gunmaker's apprentices as trials of skill. According to another assumption miniature pistols served as awards for high ranking officers of cavalry units equipped with firearms. This view is founded on a painting by Dirck Jacobsz, created back in 1557.<sup>1</sup> It depicts members of the Amsterdam militia wearing small harquebuses as badges on the upper arm.

However if you consider the great effort, the incredible skill and accuracy of craftsmanship which is necessary in order to create a fully functional wheel-lock pistol *en miniature*, at least the first hypothesis seems less probable. Against the background of the technical resources a craftsman had in the 16th century it appears like a miracle engendering such a miniature by cutting its components from steel by hand and assembling these to a functional system or rather a piece of art. So a third assumption regarding the context of these miniature arms seems the most likely. According to this they formed part of *Kunst- and Wunderkammern* or cabinet of curiosities, which have been created since the Renaissance by the high nobility of Europe. A wonderful example for such a cabinet of curiosities is that assembled by Rudolf II. in Prague.

Generally speaking these Wunderkammern contained objects considered precious, remarkable or exotic. This incorporated *Artificialia*, *Naturalia*, *Exotica* and *Scientifica*, meaning pieces of art, items coming from nature, or related to foreign cultures and science. Also weapons that were either unusual or considered as art belonged to suchlike collections.<sup>2</sup> As an example for the existence of miniature wheel-lock-pistols in cabinets of curiosities, one might refer to the treasury of the Teutonic Order in Vienna.<sup>3</sup> You can find a comparable miniature pistol preserved there that is mentioned in the inventory of 1656. Two further pieces at the Bavarian National Museum in Munich are known to come from Ambras castle in Austria, so they probably also formed part of such a collection.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the treasury of the Dukes of

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<sup>1</sup> Amsterdam town museum (Inv. A7344).

<sup>2</sup> Gundestrup, B. (1991): The Royal Danish Kunstkammer 1737, pp. 218.

<sup>3</sup> Beuing, R. (2015): Die Schatzkammer des Deutschen Ordens, p. 202, No. 158.

<sup>4</sup> Schalkhaußer, E. (1972): Die Handfeuerwaffen des Bayerischen Nationalmuseums, p. 72, No. 100, Inv. No. W 1566 and W 1567, in: Waffen- und Kostümkunde, vol. 1, 1972.

Württemberg<sup>5</sup>, the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden<sup>6</sup> and the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna<sup>7</sup> keep a comparable miniature pistol as part of their *Kunstkammer*.

### **Attribution to Michel Mann (active 1590 – 1630 in Nuremberg)**

It was Hans Schedelmann, who attributed the pistol at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna to the oeuvre of Michel Mann in Nuremberg.<sup>8</sup> This attribution is based on the manner of the engraving at the stock that corresponds to the type shown on signed small boxes. A further aspect might support that Michel Mann manufactured also miniature weapons besides the caskets he is so famous for. Doppelmayr wrote about him:

„Ein Kunst-Schlosser, hatte ein besonderes Belieben fast beständig kleine eiserne Trühlein, die er mit künstlichen subtilen Schloß – und Riegel-Wercken versahe, sauber ätzte, und schön verguldete, dann auch kleine Büchsen und Pistolen aus Eisen, die ebenfalls geätzt und verguldet wurden, zu machen, welche Stücke man noch bis dato vor schöne Kunst-wercke erkennet. Starb nach A. 1630.“<sup>9</sup>

Translation:

„An art metalworker who had a particular passion in manufacturing small iron boxes that he furnished with subtle locks, neatly etched and gilded, then also tiny guns and pistols of iron, etched and gilded, too, which are valued until today as beautiful pieces of art. Died in Augsburg, 1630”

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<sup>5</sup> Since May 2016 this *Kunstkammer* is on view at the Landesmuseum Stuttgart in the modernized permanent exhibition *Wahre Schätze*. Inv. No. KK gelb 23.

<sup>6</sup> Schöbel, J. (1973): *Prunkwaffen*, p. 163, No. 135 and image on p. 192.

<sup>7</sup> Schedelmann, H. (1972): *Die großen Büchsenmacher*, p. 54.; Gamber, O., Beaufort-Spontin, C. (1978): *Curiositäten und Inventionen aus Kunst- und Rüstammer*, p. 23.

<sup>8</sup> Schedelmann, H. (1972): *Die großen Büchsenmacher*, p. 54.

<sup>9</sup> Johann Gabriel Doppelmayr: *Historische Nachricht von den Nürnbergischen Mathematicis und Künstlern, welche fast von dreyen Seculis her Durch ihre Schrifften und Kunst-Bemühungen die Mathematic und mehreste Künste in Nürnberg vor andern trefflich befördert, und sich um solche sehr wohl verdient gemacht, zu einem guten Exempel, und zur weiteren rühmlichen Nachahmung, In Zweyen Theilen an das Liecht gestellet, Auch mit vielen nützlichen Anmerckungen und verschiedenen Kupffern versehen von Johann Gabriel Doppelmayr, Der Kayserl. Leopoldino-Carolinischen Academiae Naturae Curiosum, auch der Königl. Preußischen Societät der Wissenschaften Mitglied und Professore Publ. Mathematicum. Nuremberg 1730, p. 297.*

## Comparable examples

Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich, Inv. No. W1569.<sup>1011</sup>

Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin, Inv. No. W 1158.1-5.

Historisches Museum, Basel, Inv. No. 1904.2321.<sup>12</sup>

Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Inv. No. A2232 and A2233.<sup>13</sup>

Landesmuseum Württemberg, Inv. No. KK gelb 23.

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Inv. No. 32.136.

Musée du Louvre, Paris, Inv. No. M1697.<sup>14</sup>

Museo Poldi Pezzoli, Milan, Inv. No. 2229, 2225, 2230, 2227, 2231.<sup>15</sup>

Schatzkammer des Deutschen Ordens, Vienna.<sup>16</sup>

Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Inv. No. HMD 1441.<sup>17</sup>

Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Inv. No. 356-1864, 357-1864.

Wallace Collection, London, Inv. No. A1165 und 1166.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Schalkhaußer, E. (1988): Kataloge des Bayerischen Nationalmuseums Handfeuerwaffen, pp. 118.

<sup>11</sup> Schalkhaußer, E. (1972): Die Handfeuerwaffen des Bayerischen Nationalmuseums, p. 57, in: Waffen- und Kostümkunde, vol. 1, 1972.

<sup>12</sup> Salvisberg, A. (2011): Das Museum Faesch, p. 85, fig. 4, in: Historisches Museum Basel (publisher): Die grosse Kunstkammer.

<sup>13</sup> Schedelmann, H. (1972): Die großen Büchsenmacher, p. 54.; Gamber, O., Beaufort-Spontin, C. (1978): Curiositäten und Inventionen aus Kunst- und Rüstkammer, S. 23.

<sup>14</sup> Malgouyres, P. (2014): Armes Européennes, p. 135.

<sup>15</sup> Museo Poldi Pezzoli (1986): Armeria II, pp. 512, fig. 1215, 1216, 1218, 1223, 1224, 1225 and 1226.

<sup>16</sup> Beuing, R. (2015): Die Schatzkammer des Deutschen Ordens, p. 202, No. 158.

<sup>17</sup> Schöbel, J. (1973): Prunkwaffen, p. 163, No. 135 and image on p. 192.

<sup>18</sup> Capwell, T. (2011): Masterpieces of European Arms and Armour in the Wallace Collection, p. 142 and image on p. 143.





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