

FIREARS FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE "TEOHARI ANTONESCU" GIURGIU COUNTY MUSEUM

GHEORGHE Ionuț-Cristian

Abstract. *The work presents the firearms collection of the „Teohari Antonescu” Giurgiu County Museum. The weapon collection of Giurgiu museum was established after 1950 and developed together with the museum, at a fluctuating pace. As for the firearms, a 1963 register mentions 7 items; these were a few flintlock pistols and rifles, of which four had been included in the permanent collection. Later on, when the decision to create the Giurgiu Museum for the Romanian people’s fight for independence was made, the historical patrimony of the museum developed dramatically, including the knife and firearm collections. The current weapon collection of “Teohari Antonescu” County Museum includes 184 items: out of a total of 53 firearms, 48 have been maintained almost intact.*

Keywords: *firearms, collection, Giurgiu County Museum.*

“Teohari Antonescu” County Museum was established in 1934, through a decision of Vlașca Prefecture. From 1950 to 1980, the museum was successively under county and municipal administration, to be changed later into a section with no legal personality. In 1981, following the amendment of the administrative-territorial reform, it regained its status as a county museum, with history and ethnography sections and an office for the national cultural patrimony. From 1977 to 1990, its permanent collection was called the “Museum for the Romanian people’s fight for independence” but in 1993 it regained its pre-war name, “Teohari Antonescu”. From 1999 to 2005 the collection of the history and archaeology section was gradually restored.

The changes that occurred in Giurgiu society after the Second World War affected the collection of items likely to have been included in the military history patrimony. As neither the institutions, nor the private collectors showed interest in this domain, most items were destroyed or confiscated, then sent to the higher echelons, to Bucharest as a general rule.

The weapon collection of Giurgiu museum was established after 1950 and developed together with the museum, at a fluctuating pace. First of all, it was enriched by the confiscations made in the early period of the communist regime, when private ownership of firearms was forbidden by the law. Even (panoply or parade) knives were subject to a special permit.

Since an important part of the archives of the former district museum was destroyed, the documents attesting the origin of the first weapons included in its patrimony were not found. As for the firearms, a 1963 register mentions 7 items, bearing the entry numbers 835-841.

These were a few flintlock pistols and rifles, of which four had been included in the permanent collection; unfortunately the weapons were stolen and the Militia of the time only recovered the barrel of one pistol and several parts of another (which kept its firing system, although the barrel had been cut).

In 1975, Ilfov County Museum was established and Giurgiu Museum was turned into one of its sections. At the time, it had four flintlock pistols, a rocket gun and the remains of the two stolen and recovered weapons. Later on, when the decision to create the Giurgiu Museum for the Romanian people’s fight for independence was made, and as a result of the enforcement of Law no. 63/1974, the historical patrimony of the museum developed dramatically, including the knife and firearm collections.

A part of the weapons belonging to the patrimony of the museum for the Romanian people’s fight for independence were acquired from Buftea cinema studios, the stage props of which included all kinds of authentic disused weapons that had been confiscated from private owners by the former Militia. In the fall of 1976, two transfers were made from “Romaniafilm” Central Office, certified by documents registered in the archives of “Teohari Antonescu” County Museum. The first protocol attests the existence of more knives than firearms, although among the latter there is a Turkish flint pistol. The second one, tersely mentions “22 panoply pistols” (protocol of 18.12.1976), which are actually different firearms.

The county institutions were another source of collection items. Two artillery pieces, which used to guard the monument to the memory of the First World War heroes, were transferred from Tunari commune hall. Two pistols and a Krnka rifle¹ were brought from the school of Ion Roată commune. The municipal Militia delivered two old hunting guns, discovered after the earthquake of March 4, 1977: a building used as storehouse, located in the yard of School no. 4 of Giurgiu, collapsed during the earthquake and the above mentioned weapons turned up from a hiding place that had been abandoned for several decades.

For the opening of the 1977 exhibition, Brăila Museum lent the Museum for the Romanian people’s fight for independence two of the eleven rifles having belonged to the Turkish sailors of “Dubă-Seifi” ship, recovered by divers from the depths of the Danube. A decade later, following an exchange of exhibits between the two institutions, the respective rifles definitively entered the patrimony of Giurgiu museum.

¹ C. König, Cr. M. Vlădescu, *Armamentul portativ din dotarea armatei române 1821 – 1916*, I.P. „Fabrica de timbre”, București, p. 9.

In the period following the celebration of the centenary of Romania's independence, the only entries in the firearm collection were two individual donations, made in 1983 and, respectively, in 2008. They are revolvers having belonged to military of the American aviation, which bombed Giurgiu harbor during the Second World War, proofs of the fierce battles fought in this place at the time.

Until 1982, the weapons belonging to the museum collection, together with the rest of its scientific patrimony, were in the custody of curators Mihai Ionescu and Constantin Isăcescu. The initiative of a separate collection belonged to curator Damian Ancu, but its organization and records since 1985 have been the merit of curator Mircea Alexa, who is currently in charge of the collection.

Most of the items were restored in the 1980s by a group of collaborators of the museum, among whom Traian Anghel and Gheorghe Popescu, as well as by other technicians of Giurgiu Shipyard, who searched appropriate solutions for the display of the permanent collections. Under an agreement with the same enterprise, the two cannons were sandblasted and repainted, and their wheels were restored by an employee of the museum, Marin Șoavă. The ornaments of the oriental rifles were partially restored by Mihai Ionescu and a number of items were brought back to their original condition by Mariana Simion. The collection was presented in several articles in the local press (the most important of them were published in "Valahia" magazine) and at a scientific communication, published in the Bulletin of the National Military Museum (no 1/2003, part I, new series). All of them were written by curator Mircea Alexa.

The current weapon collection of "Teohari Antonescu" County Museum includes 184 items: out of a total of 53 firearms, 48 have been maintained almost intact. Five other weapons have survived only partially; 12 diverse projectiles and 119 knives are still in existence. An impressive collection of projectiles, most of them dug out during the excavations carried out at the Island Fortress, are to be studied and preserved separately.

Several weapons belonging to the museum collection have an interesting history: the two rifles belonging to Turkish sailors of "Duba-Seifi" ship, recovered from the Danube and transferred from Brăila, were inventoried as BSACO weapons. Thanks to the modern means of information, the acronym BSACO could be analyzed, leading to the identification of the manufacturing enterprise: Birmingham Small Arms Company (BSACO); later on, the weapons were identified and their brand could be properly established: pattern 1865 Enfield naval rifles (Arm. 118²). The data found in the record card of a dueling percussion-cap pistol (Arm. 139/146) used in the latter half of the 19th century and belonging to the museum collection, were completed by using the digital information resources. After analysis of the text engraved on the pistol barrel it was established that it had been manufactured by Immanuel Meffert, its place of origin was the German town of Suhl, famous for its production of firearms, and it had been produced between 1870 and 1882 (Arm. 139/146).

Our collaboration with expert Ioan I. Scafeș allowed us to identify other items. First of all, a Balkan hunting rifle was correctly identified as actually being a German hunting rifle (flintlock rifle) of the 17th century; then, the place of origin of several Balkan hunting rifles (flintlock rifles) could be established more accurately as being production centers of Northern Bulgaria. This collaboration also resulted in the classification of 19 items in the fund of the national cultural patrimony.

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² Ian V. Hogg, Graham Smith, *Les Armes de Guerre Portatives*, CELIV, Paris, 1994, p. 124.

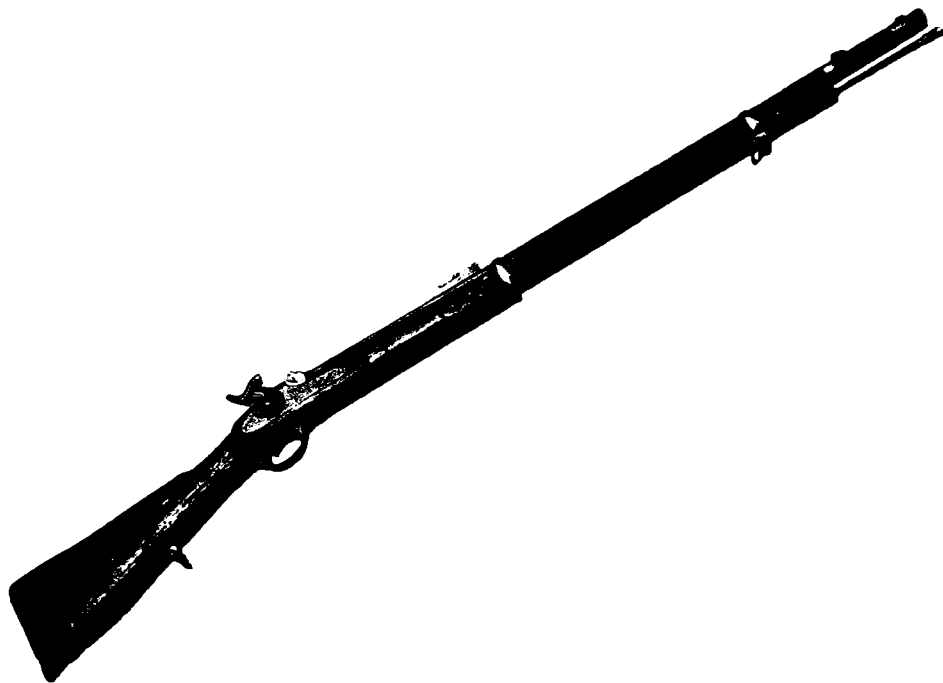


Fig. 1. Arm. 118.



Fig. 2. Arm. 118 (fire mecanism).

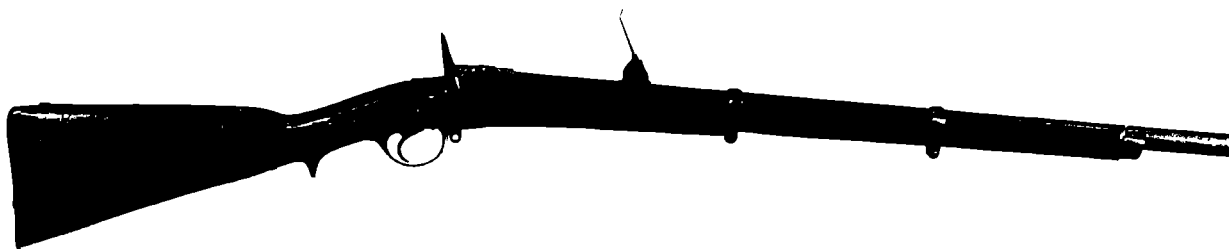


Fig. 3. Arm. 124.



Fig. 4. Arm. 124 (fire mecanism).



Fig. 5. Arm. 139, 146.



Fig. 6. Arm. 139,146 (fire system).