



Dispatches from the Field
Conservation

**Conservation of the Master of the
Animal-Head Scroll
(Meister der Tierkopfrancke) Wheellock Rifle**



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

For most objects in the Department of Arms and Armor the maker or artist isn't known. In some cases, there is nonetheless good evidence for an attribution to a particular workshop. Some of our objects are signed, but for the most part the works of art cannot be associated with known craftsmen.

Like the ceramic makers of Ancient Greece, an artist's name may be unknown but with study we can begin to recognize their style or hand in an unsigned work. So it is with this [wheellock rifle](#), whose lock and barrel are beautifully decorated with highly raised silver and a layer of gilding, and mounted on a finely carved wooden stock. The so-called Master of the Animal-Head Scroll, to whom the carved stock is attributed, is named after the eponymous motifs invariably featured in the carved ornament.



Fig. 3

When the Museum acquired the wheellock, much of the decoration on the metalwork was obscured by silver sulfides and old grime. Some sections of the lockplate exhibited worn but still visible gilding, though only where there was no silver encrustation. A section of the lockplate covered by the patchbox lid provided exciting prospects (figure 4), revealing not only bright silver encrustation but a glimpse of the expected, untouched gilding in the space between the raised silver decoration. The need for conservation required the rifle's partial disassembly, limited to the removal of the barrel and the lock. The interior lock mechanism was in excellent condition with only modest corrosion and grime. Treatment therefore focused on addressing the exterior appearance of the metalwork.



Fig. 4

Unfortunately, the section of lockplate covered by the patchbox lid was in distinctly better condition than the remainder of the metalwork. While the silver was cleaned and brightened with relative ease, most sections of the gun no longer retained significant amounts of gilding. The exceptions were where the surface had been covered or protected, like the area immediately under the patchbox lid. A similar pattern of preservation was found around some sections of the exterior lock mechanisms, and around the rear barrel sight. Everywhere else, probably as a result of handling and use, as well as repeated polishing of the silver, the gilding has almost completely worn away. These small areas of preserved gilding give a sense of the original appearance of the whole rifle.

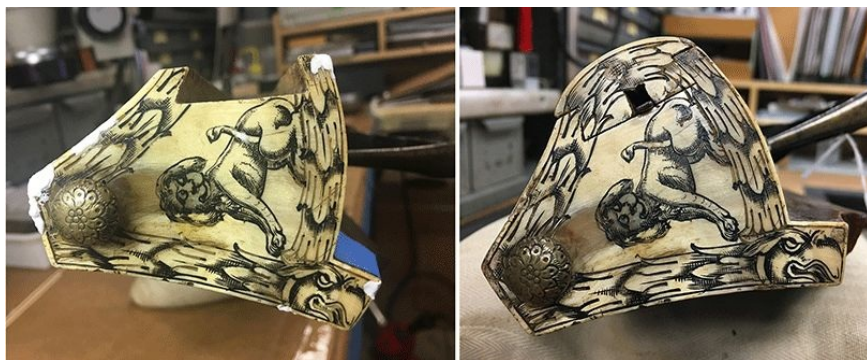


Fig. 5



Fig. 6

Compared to the losses to the gilding, the dense silver encrustation is very well preserved. Cleaning the silver not only revealed detail but also improved the contrast and readability of the overall decoration. Following the cleaning, all of the silver was lacquered. The interior of the lock was waxed and reassembled, and a protective coating of wax was laid over the lacquered areas.



Figs. 7, 8

Additional work was needed for the butt of the stock, an applied panel of bone, which had suffered insect damage. Multiple holes were visible on the panel, as well as losses and damage surrounding several of the holes. After ascertaining that there was no active infestation, the holes and losses were filled with a mixture of glass micro-balloons and an acrylic adhesive. Reversible, this fill material was easily shaped and painted to match surrounding material.

While this exceptional example of work by the Master of the Animal-head Scroll is not currently on view, planned work in the [Department's Russell B. Aitken Gallery of Firearms \(Gallery 375\)](#) will allow us to display this beautiful wheellock in the future.

Fig. 1 Wheellock after treatment. Master of the Animal-Head Scroll (Meister der Tierkopfranke) (Austrian, active 1624–59). Wheellock Rifle, ca. 1630–40. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Purchase, Arthur Ochs Sulzberger Gift and Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 2018 ([2018.103](#))

Fig. 2 Wheellock Rifle. Detail of carved stock after treatment.

Fig. 3 Wheellock Rifle. Detail of stock and lock before treatment. Photo by Stephen Bluto

Fig. 4 Wheellock Rifle. Preserved gilding on lock plate. Photo by author.

Fig. 5 Wheellock Rifle. Rear barrel sight before cleaning. Photo by author.

Fig. 6 Wheellock Rifle. Read barrel sight removed, during treatment. Photo by author.

Fig. 7 Wheellock Rifle. Repair of insect damage to stock, during treatment. Photo by author.

Fig. 8 Wheellock Rifle. Completed repair and fills of stock. Photo by author.

Unless otherwise indicated, photographs of works in the Metropolitan Museum’s collection are by the Imaging Department, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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