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**Autor-s / Author-s:** Igor Goñi Mendizabal

**Filiación académica /Institution:** Universidad del País Vasco-Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea

**Dirección electrónica de contacto / e-mail:** igor.goni@ehu.es

# Trademarks in Basque Gunmaking Industry. The case of ASTRA-Unceta y Cía.

Igor Goñi Mendizabal  
University of the Basque Country

## 1. Introduction

The main aim of this paper is to study the evolution of the use of trademarks and brands in basque gunmaking industry in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For that after paying attention to the historical background of this activity in the Basque Country we will first try to obtain some conclusions from the analysis of a wide sample of brands used by basque manufacturers and dealers. After that we will try to make a deeper study of the issue through the case of *ASTRA-Unceta y Cía*. one of the most important and significant firms of this sector in Spain.

## 2. Historical background: basque gunmaking in Modern Age<sup>1</sup>

Due to its iron ore deposits and other good features the Basque Country has had a very long tradition of ironworking, and among other products, of manufacturing weapons<sup>2</sup>. Basque smiths, who had made swords, spears, crossbows, arrows, helmets, armors and bucklers during Middle Ages, started to produce firearms at the beginning of the Modern Age and Spanish Crown's huge demand fostered this business during the following centuries.

The first news we have related firearms manufacturing in the Basque Country are some purchases made by the Crown in the last years of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup><sup>3</sup>. These primitive and heavy arquebuses, that were not more than a roughly made barrel merely attached to a wooden stock, started to be more common in the military contracts signed by basque craftsmen sharing space with cold

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<sup>1</sup> All the information contained here is mainly based on the works of Carrión (1998, 2000), Calvó (1997), Gómez Rivero (1999), Larrañaga (1990,2001), and Paul (1976).

<sup>2</sup> Basque Country is a region that is located in the north of Spain and south-west of France. The current Basque Country autonomous community is formed by three provinces (Álava, Gipuzkoa and Bizkaia). Navarre and part of the French department of Pyrénées-Atlantiques are also considered part of the Basque Country from a cultural point of view.

<sup>3</sup> Firearms were already used in the Basque Country during the local War of the Bands (14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries) and Basque soldiers sent to the War of Granada (1482-1492) brought this kind of weapons, so it is likely to think that this manufacturing was not new for Basque smiths by that time.

weapons and artillery guns. At that time the law gave to the Crown a preeminent position as weapon purchaser over the interests of private customers.

Arms manufacturing also experienced a high regional specialization. Thereby, firearms production tended to be located in the villages surrounding Placencia de las Armas-Soraluze (Gipuzkoa), namely Eibar, Elgoibar, Ermua, Bergara and Mondragon. Otherwise pike manufacturing was mainly concentrated in Elorrio (Bizkaia), though there are news of being made in Elgeta and Oñati too, both in Gipuzkoa. Other kind of cold weapons such as swords or spears were made in Bilbao and Durango in the province of Bizkaia, and Mondragon and Tolosa in Gipuzkoa. During 16<sup>th</sup> century, due to the increasing use of firearms by the Spanish *Tercios*, the workshops of Gipuzkoa flourished while those of Bizkaia decayed, exception made to Elorrio whose pikes were still widely used.

All those villages are located in the narrow valley of the river Deba, or very close to it. This location gave an easy access to water power and raw materials like wood and high quality iron. Other villages of this valley and other places of Gipuzkoa, not being directly involved in arms production, took some profit supplying transport services, wood or accessories for the guns<sup>4</sup>. The guns were mainly transported by boat following the river to the nearby seaport of Deba but also by mules when the final destination was inland.

The armament purchases for the Crown were made through private merchants, the so called *asentistas*, who acted as intermediaries with the gunsmiths establishing the delivery terms and financing the acquisition of raw materials. The final reception of the guns and the control of the fulfillment of quality standards was the responsibility of a royal official. The contracts, or *asientos*, arranged during the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century let us estimate the production of this period over 400.000 firearms, not taking into account those made for private customers.

In times of the king Philip II, as a consequence of the intensification of war, the Crown decided to change the whole defense policy increasing its control over all the issues involved in it. In the case of firearms the main aim was to ensure a sufficient

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<sup>4</sup> Beyond coal for forging, ash timber was used for pikes and walnut for stocks, so these kind of trees were widely planted and forestry business spread through the territory. The abovementioned accessories were powder flasks, leather bands or cords that were sold along with the firearms.

supply of firearms for home defense<sup>5</sup>. That is why, in 1573, the king gave the name of Royal Factories to the whole of workshops establishing central headquarters in Placencia de las Armas-Soraluze<sup>6</sup>. This was not a real factory but an administrative center from which king's officials controlled the production process and the place where finished guns were received. Lately the Crown, afraid of their final destination, extended its officials' duty also to private production. No gun could be sold without the previous permission of the royal supervisor. As a result of this measure during the 17<sup>th</sup> century the basque firearm manufacturing remained almost exclusively linked to military demand. Similarly, in the case of cold weapons the Crown created the Royal Armory of Tolosa with a double function, on the one side it was the place where the arms made in the workshops of the region were received; on the other hand, it was a factory ruled directly by royal officials. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century both establishments were managed by one only superintendent designated by the King. The potential production of these facilities was estimated in 20.000 firearms per year.

One of the consequences of limiting the production to military demand is that craftsmen did not have incentives for innovation. They had to adapt their production exactly to the models given by the Crown, and Spanish army was reluctant to adopt more modern firearms when other countries as Netherlands or Sweden were already doing it<sup>7</sup>. Consequently basque gun manufacturers' technological backwardness gradually increased. The gunsmiths working for the Court in Madrid or others located in Ripoll (Catalonia) made their guns attending the needs and taste of their customers in a competitive market so they had to try to do their best to accomplish what they were asked for, be aware of latest innovations and, also, try to innovate by themselves.

After the Spanish Succession War, with a new dynasty on the throne, some changes came to basque gunmaking. The *asiento* system returned but, contrary to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Crown preferred to establish long term contracts with wealthy merchants who assumed the management of the Royal Factories as a whole. After some failures, due to financing problems, the *Real Compañía Guipuzcoana de Caracas*

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<sup>5</sup> During the revolt of the *moriscos* of Granada (1568-71) the Crown had to import firearms and other war material from Italy in order to arm the troops.

<sup>6</sup> These headquarters were at a house known in basque as Errege-Etxea, King's House in English.

<sup>7</sup> By late 17th century flintlock muskets were widely used in most European armies but not in Spain where military leaders remained faithful to obsolete arquebuses and matchlock muskets.

took over this duty in 1735 as a compensation of the taxes this firm had to pay for its trade with Venezuela. This contract was renewed until 1785 when this company merged into the new *Real Compañía de Filipinas* and the contract was subrogated to this firm. During this period the annual average production of muskets was 12.000.

The internal organization of the production also changed with the emergence of gunsmiths' guilds: barrel makers, stock makers, lock makers and assemblers<sup>8</sup>. The director of the Royal Factory had to arrange with every guild the pieces to be made and the price to be paid to fulfill the contracts, and, after that, the work was distributed among the associated craftsmen according to their production capability. Once the gun was finished a royal official, the *maestro examinador*, verified the accomplishment of the conditions established in the contract. We do not know exactly when but, during 18<sup>th</sup> century, the craftsmen received permission to resume production for private market and some basque manufacturers became proficient in the production of all the parts of the gun and started to gain some recognition<sup>9</sup>.

However, this favorable period was abruptly cut by the war. In 1794, during the war against Revolutionary France, the province of Gipuzkoa was invaded by French troops. As a result the Royal Factories fell under enemy's control and Eibar, which tried to resist, was ransacked and burned. A significant number of basque gunsmiths fled to the west, and the Crown, who distrusted the strategic location of the factories, so close to the border. Taking advantage of the presence of basque workers the Crown decided to create a new factory in Asturias, the Royal Factory of Oviedo. From this moment on this new facility gradually became the main supplier for the Spanish army and the most important competitor for the basque gun manufacturing sector.

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<sup>8</sup> The barrel makers, *cañonistas*, forged the barrels of the guns; the stock makers, *cajeros*, prepared the wooden parts; the lock makers, *llaveros*, were responsible of the mechanical parts of the guns and finally the assemblers, *aparejeros*, put all the parts together, adjusting them, and polished the whole gun.

<sup>9</sup> "That which is called an arms factory does not signify that which is normally believed. Various artisans established in Ermua, Eibar, Placencia, Elgoibar and Mondragón make the various parts that comprise the fusil. This art has been subdivided into three types of manufacturers, who work separately; barrel makers, lock makers, stock makers, and there is even another, *arreeros*, who are those who fashion triggerguards, barrel bands. There are many who know how to make and do make all of these, although prohibited by the old ordinance, but more often each artist work in his field. The barrel makers know how to inlay rear and front sights of silver and the pieces of gold adornment in the steel, and to blue it with the utmost perfection; the lock makers work and sculpture the iron into the forms they desire and polish it with much cleanness, and likewise the *arredores*: as do the stokemakers in the manufacture of stocks. The most famous of these artists is the owner of this house [Esteban Bustinduy of Eibar], son of another as well renowned: his fame rests on the excellence of his barrels, although he manufactures all parts. He works for various grandees and lords of the court, for America, England, France, Russia and other places, from where there frequently come commissions.", M. J. Jovellanos, August 1791, cited in Lavin (1965), p. 142.

### **3. Basque gunmaking industry (1800-1936)**

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as the importance of military contracts decreased, the magnitude of private business began to grow due to the increasing demand of handguns and shotguns for hunting. Basque gunsmiths had to improve their skills in order to introduce the last technical innovations their clients asked for, such as the percussion locks. In this process the town of Eibar became the most important production centre of the region because their gunsmiths, not so specialized as those from Placencia de las Armas-Soraluze, were able to adapt to these changes<sup>10</sup>.

Despite the official persistence of the traditional system, the fact is that the government started to purchase the supply of certain war materials through some basque manufacturers that acted as intermediaries for local workshops. The Royal Factories in the Basque Country, but also the Royal Factory of Oviedo, had to respect the traditional distribution of work and the wages stated by the guilds. On the contrary, private intermediaries could negotiate the conditions of the contract with the workshops they wanted without taking into account any equal distribution of the production as the royal factories did. As a result the prices offered were more competitive.

Unfortunately war guns production was limited to public contracts preventing the modernization of basque firms who did not dare to make huge investments. Once the military manufacturing was liberalized in 1860, and due to new contracts, modern and bigger companies appeared in the region. The building of the headquarters of the ancient Royal Factories in Placencia de las armas-Soraluze was used as a Proof Bank for some years before being definitely closed in 1865.

But during the Third Carlist War (1872-1876), where actions occurred mostly in the Basque Country, those modern factories fell under control of the rebel forces and the government couldn't take any advantage of the gun production capabilities it had helped to develop by previous contracts. After the war most of the basque gunmaking firms hoped to resume their military business but new contracts didn't come. The

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<sup>10</sup> In Placencia most of the gunsmiths were lock makers but in the case of Eibar the presence of guilds was more balanced. Once the more simple percussion lock appeared, the craftsmen of Placencia de las Armas-Soraluze held to tradition and those of Eibar started to make complete guns with new locks.

government was reluctant to promote an industry in a region that had led a revolt against its authority.

In this situation, Basque gunmaking firms decided to specialize in producing guns for civil market (shotguns, for hunting, and revolvers and pistols for self defense) in a moment that the demand of this kind of product was beginning to increase. As we can see in table 1 in thirty years the gun production in Eibar became fourfold thanks to the increasing sales of revolvers. Although revolvers were also used for military purposes, it was in limited quantities because only officers and some auxiliary troops could carry them<sup>11</sup>. Most of the revolvers manufactured in Eibar were small sized and designed to be kept in a pocket<sup>12</sup>. Even though the shotgun production does not seem to be so important, their value was comparatively higher, so in monetary terms their presence was more significant than showed. On the other hand pistols referred in the chart are one or two-shots pistols and not semiautomatic pistols which were not manufactured before the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Table 1. Total production of guns in Eibar by gun type in 1881, 1891, 1901 and 1909.**

Gun type	1881		1891		1901		1909	
	Units	%	Units	%	Units	%	Units	%
<i>Shotguns of all types</i>	34.457	25,9	39.004	24,8	62.649	23,2	44.492	8,9
<i>Pistols*</i>	77.066	57,8	51.257	32,6	32.072	11,9	25.747	5,1
<i>Revolvers</i>	21.097	15,8	65.434	41,7	173.587	64,2	429.308	85,7
<i>Rifles, cartridges and Remington carbines</i>	598	0,4	1.345	0,9	1.954	0,7	1.420	0,3
<b>Production total</b>	133.218	100	157040	100	270262	100	500.967	100
<b>Index</b>	100		118		203		376	

*\*It mainly refers to pistols of one or two shots. Semiautomatic pistols' manufacturing started at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.*

*Source: Mujica (1908)*

The integration of world market seems to have been one of the factors that explains the expansion of basque gun production. The first telegraph station was built in Eibar in 1883 and the railway in 1887 providing to basque gunsmiths the opportunity

<sup>11</sup> *Orbea Hermanos*, for example, sold some quantities of revolvers for the army. Being a good deal for a company this demand could not be enough to hold up the whole industry.

<sup>12</sup> Smith, Bull-Dog, Velodog or Puppy were the type of revolvers manufactured at that time.

to access to far markets never reached before. The electrification has been noted as another element to be taken into account. The dependence from water power supply in such a narrow valley constrained the factories to a very little space, but the electricity, being easier to transport, allowed the industry to respond to the increasing demand opening new workshops and factories.

The gunmaking industry at the end of the 19th century had its centre in the town of Eibar, with a population of 10.000 at that time, and was configured as an industrial district. There were not very big companies but a wide network of small workshops that produced pieces for medium size assembling factories. In the case of handgun manufacturing the average size was bigger than in shotguns production since high quality workers were not so necessary and they integrated most of the production process in the same building<sup>13</sup>. This structure resembled to the traditional system of the Royal Factories. Another characteristic of this industry was the persistence of stint working a practice considered by workers like a right they deserved as gunsmiths<sup>14</sup>.

**Table 2. The gunmaking industrial district of Eibar in april 1914**

	<b>Firms</b>	<b>Workers</b>
SHOTGUNS	12	150
PISTOLS	16	475
REVOLVERS	24	1.020
PISTOLS AND REVOLVERS	6	459
Total (gunmaking)	58	2.104
BIG FOUNDRIES	3	114
SMALL FOUNDRIES	6	48
Total (Iron forging)	9	162

Note: Eibar at that time had a population of 11.000

Source: Eibar Municipality archive

The most relevant characteristic of basque gunmaking industry was the significance of exports. Almost 80 per cent of the production, and sometimes more

<sup>13</sup> In 1914, before the war, the biggest companies were Orbea y Cía. with a staff of 400 workers and Gárate, Anitua y Cía. with 200, both handgun manufacturers.

<sup>14</sup> Visitors to that time Eibar described how workers, most of them socialists, used to work in advance on Sundays morning in order to weak up later on Mondays. Sometimes, knowing that a lot of workers were free, basque pelota matches were arranged on Monday mornings and the pelota court inaugurated at that time, the same that exists today, was called *Astelena*, the basque word for Monday.

than that figure, was sold to foreign countries. This success must be mostly ascribed to handguns and not to shotguns since the market of the latter was mainly national.

This high degree of competitiveness abroad was a result of the combination of three factors that determined the strategy followed by basque firms. The first one was the low protection given by Spanish patent law to foreign designers. If the patent was not put into practice in a three years term, the access to the technical information included was opened<sup>15</sup>.

The second factor was the absence of any compulsory proof in Spain. In other countries all the guns had to suffer some quality proofs before being introduced in the market. Once the proofs were passed the Official Proof Bank stamped a mark on the gun and these marks were recognized abroad by international agreements, but not all the countries possessed this type of institutions nor had signed these agreements. In the case a gun was exported from a not compulsory proof country to one that had it, they had to pass only a not so strict functioning exam. Eventually, these two factors gave to basque gun makers the chance to produce low cost imitations of European and American handguns.

Finally, the configuration of the sector as an industrial district, with its network of small and medium size companies, permitted to offer a wide variety of guns and a great flexibility to adapt to any change in demand or customers' tastes. There were not economies of scale in Eibar gun production but economies of scope.

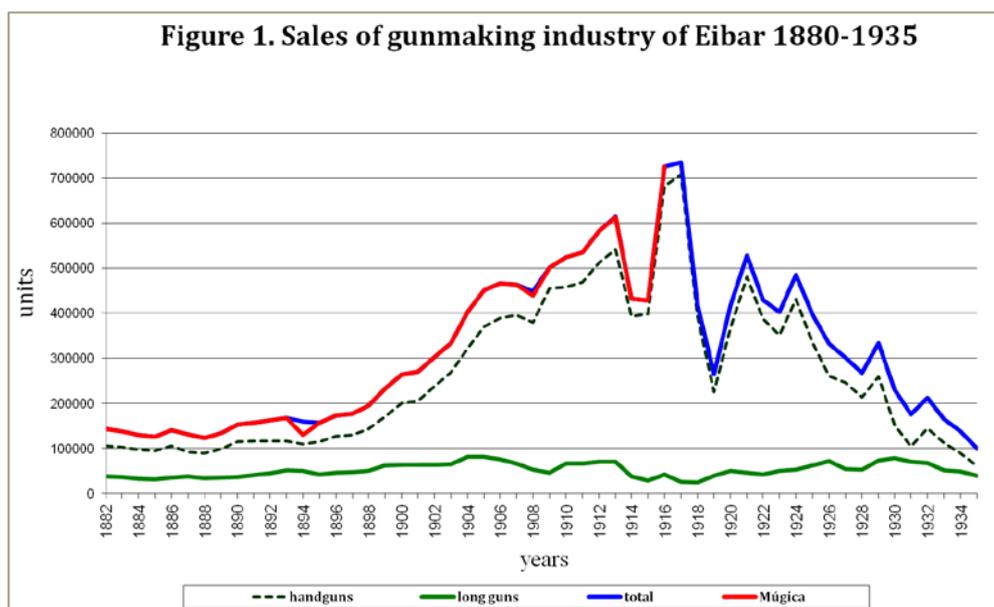
Regretfully the specialization in this kind of low quality guns had as a result the discredit of Spanish guns in international markets. Thereby, for those companies that were trying to compete increasing the quality of their products overcoming that bad reputation was a hard task to deal with. As we will see later this situation had a considerable influence in the strategy followed by gun makers regarding trademarks.

During First World War, after some months of crisis due to uncertainty generated by the breakdown of the war, the exports of basque pistols and revolvers brought the production to historical maximum levels (see Figure 1). Although at the beginning they tried to sell guns to Germany too, the circumstances of the war obliged them to become Allies' suppliers. During the four years of war almost two million pistols and

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<sup>15</sup> Gun designers, eg. John M. Browning, Georg Luger, etc. patented their gun systems in Spain looking for a protection they did not receive. For spanish patent system see Saiz (1999).

revolvers were purchased by British and French armies. This huge and unusual military demand of handguns was a consequence of the special features of trench warfare during the conflict. When common soldiers faced the enemy at a close combat into a muddy narrow trench preferred to handle a small firearm than a long heavy rifle. The most successful product in this period was the Eibar type pistol, known also as Ruby pistols due to the brand used by one of the manufacturers. This handgun was a cheap copy of the Browning system pistols manufactured in Belgium by the *Fabrique Nationale d'armes de Guerre* and also in the United States by *Colt Firearms Co.*<sup>16</sup>.



Source: Paul Arzac (1978) and Mujica (1908)

The poor quality of many of these pistols increased the bad credit of basque guns after the war, and the international markets were full of Eibar type pistols. At the same time, in the postwar era, the governments of almost every country commenced to apply protective commercial policies in order to recover their own industries. Thus, export markets, which had been the main destination of basque guns became less profitable and firms tried to survive the crisis turning their attention to home market.

Unfortunately Spanish social situation could not be worst. In the early twenties Spain was immersed in the so-called *Pistolerismo* phenomenon, when strikes, demonstrations,

<sup>16</sup> 'The shape of the safety catch also changed, and it became a large, bulbous, ribbed item, which always looks as if it were made by the blacksmith's apprentice while the blacksmith was out. (...) The material was often of poor quality, and the workmanship was equally poor;(...). In fairness it must be said that not every 'Eibar' pistol was cheap and nasty; many reputable firms owe their start or at least their subsequent well-being to the 'Eibar' pattern of pistol, and produced quality weapons right from the start. But, regrettably, it is true that in this particular product, the shoddy outnumbers the good by a wide margin', Hogg y Weeks (1978) p.13

quarrels between different trade unions and labor conflicts were solved using pistols and revolvers. The government used repression to reduce the increasing number of murders and attacks, especially frequent in Barcelona, and the situation became worse to the point that Prime Minister, Eduardo Dato, was shot and killed in Madrid in 1921. In addition to repressive measures the government implemented a restrictive legislation on gun production and trade. Despite the complaints of basque manufacturers and municipalities of the gunmaking region the government did not reverse its decision and the gunmaking industry had to face an intensive reduction of the sales also in the domestic market. At that time also the compulsory official proof bank started its activity, so, it was clear that new strategies were needed.

Some of the companies, taking advantage of the new legislation to promote industries that did not exist in Spain, decided to afford diversification processes. They chose products that could be adapted to their machinery and workers such as bicycles, sewing machines, shaving razors or machine-tools. Others, drawing on the experience and financial capability achieved during the war started to design high quality ordnance weapons to be offered to army and police trials. There were also firms that, having reached some recognition during the war, opted to act as intermediaries selling smaller manufacturers' products, not only guns, under their more known own brand. Finally other firms looked for new markets like Balcans or China.

As we will see in the case studied in this paper, these strategies could be combined and also influenced each other. Since Spanish law did not lessen its restrictive measures during the thirties, these trends were reinforced until the Spanish civil war broke out in 1936.

#### **4. Marks, trademarks and brands**

As other craftsmen of the middle and modern ages, firearms gunsmiths used to mark their products with their own names in order to promote the quality of their craftsmanship. This is very common in the case of those gunsmiths that individually worked for private market and there are a lot of examples of these marks as early as 16<sup>th</sup> century<sup>17</sup>. In the case of basque gunmakers, as this private production did not appear again until 18<sup>th</sup> century, the marks of modern age we know today correspond to gunsmiths of those years<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Lavin (1965, p. 266) shows us the marks used by Siegmund Marquart the most famous gunsmith in the Court of Madrid at that time. His mark was composed by a drawing of two sickles.

<sup>18</sup> Most of the marks published by Lavin in the appendix of his book were of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. All the marks are of two types: the name of the gunsmith under a crown and the drawing of an animal.

As we have mentioned before, during 17<sup>th</sup> century the basque firearm production remained under the tight control of the Crown, with no private merchant involved. At that time not only the guns but also every piece received at the Royal Factory had to be tested. That is why we infer that those piece makers might mark their work in order to be identified by the examiner of the Royal Factory.

Nevertheless, after the liberalization of gun making industry and the foundation of new modern factories something started to change. At that time international gun designers used to give to their new mechanical systems their own name and also used to create a company to exploit their patents, the firm's commercial name used to include the patentees name too. That was the way some brands were created. For example, the 'Colt system revolver', patented by Samuel Colt in 1835 and manufactured in the *Colt's Patent Firearms Manufacturing Company*, soon became 'Colt revolver' or only 'Colt'. The same happened to other firearms like Adams or Smith&Wesson revolvers, Winchester carbines or Luger pistols.

Basque manufacturers in the 1880s, when patenting their guns, started to include not only their commercial names but also specific denominations regarding the technical system of the gun that later became real brands. For example, in 1883, *Orbea Hermanos*, one of the most important factories in Eibar, patented a revolver based on Smith&Wesson models, and named it ONA, the basque word for 'GOOD'. This revolver was accepted by the government as ordnance revolver for military in 1884 and for the navy in 1885<sup>19</sup>. Similar examples were EUREKA (1888, Narciso Zulaica), ERREXA (1888, *Orbea Hermanos*), BOTA CILINDRO (1890, José Crucelegui) and EGOKIA (1890, Víctor Sarasqueta)<sup>20</sup>.

The huge growth of basque revolver production in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century promoted the need of differentiation among manufacturers since the diversity of models made was not so wide but the number of manufacturers was increasing very fast. Most of the new workshops were ruled by former workers of bigger firms.

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<sup>19</sup> This was one of the scarce contracts signed by the government with basque manufacturers in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Calvo (1997).

<sup>20</sup> ERREXA is the basque word for 'easy'; BOTA CILINDRO, is a strange combination of two Spanish words meaning 'boot cylinder' and EGOKIA, means 'appropriate' in basque language. This last brand was used to designate the system used in cane shotguns manufactured by Víctor Sarasqueta.

The first trademark regarding gun manufacturing in Spanish Registry Office was not inscribed by a basque manufacturer but by a Catalanian one. Though most of the industry was located in the Basque Country there were some manufacturers in Barcelona that mostly acted as traders. That is the case of Eduardo Schilling who registered the drawing of a boar for shotguns in 1895. The first basque gunmaking trademark, which was registered in the same year, surprisingly was not owned by a proper manufacturer but by the Proof Bank of Eibar. This institution was created in order to certify a minimum quality of the products but attending the test was voluntary. As we referred the compulsory proof was not established until 1923. These trademarks were related to the proofs that should be made: '2ª P' (Second proof), 'Pº' (Tested?) and 'EX' (Examined?)<sup>21</sup>.

In order to perform a deeper analysis we have set a sample of 690 gunmaking brands, trademarks or denominations registered by or attributed to Spanish firms. The main source we have used is the thorough study made by Juan L. Calvó on Spanish gunmaking patents and trademarks which we have completed with other sources<sup>22</sup>. The results are shown in the following tables.

**Table 3. Gunmaking trademarks and brands by location of the firm (1883-1936)**

LOCATION	NUMBER	%
Eibar	561	81,3
<i>Barcelona</i>	34	4,9
Ermua	29	4,2
Gernika-Lumo	20	2,9
Elgoibar	19	2,8
Placencia	11	1,6
<i>Madrid</i>	4	0,6
not identified	3	0,4
Zumarraga	3	0,4
Liege-Eibar	3	0,4
Bergara-Eibar	2	0,3
Markina	1	0,1
	690	100,0

The information included in table 3 is consistent with what we have explained about gun making industry. In spite of some exceptions, as those of

<sup>21</sup> Calvó (1997)

<sup>22</sup> Calvó (1997), Hogg and Weeks (1978) and Ramiro Larrañaga (2001).

Barcelona or Madrid, the majority of the trademarks regarding guns was registered or used by basque companies, most of them located in Eibar.

Table 4 refers to the characteristics of the trademarks and brands used. Although trademarks written in Spanish are significant, in our opinion, it is more relevant the fact that the rest are acronyms or are expressed in non Spanish languages, so the origin of the gun could not easily guessed by a foreigner. We wonder if basque language could be identified by that time customers and consequently linked with spanish guns. In any case, it is evident that the main aim of this brand strategy was to enter in foreign markets and, as we will see later, to hide Spanish origin of the guns.

**Table 4. Gunmaking trademarks and brands by language (1883-1936)**

<b>LANGUAGE</b>	<b>NUMBER</b>	<b>%</b>
SPANISH	180	26,0
ACRONYMS	157	22,7
ENGLISH	121	17,5
BASQUE	39	5,6
FRENCH	35	5,1
OTHERS	30	4,3
COMBINATION OF LANGUAGES	29	4,2
LATIN	24	3,5
NOT IDENTIFIED	75	11,0
	690	100,00

In the following table we can see the trademarks included in the sample classified according to the product for which they had been registered or the type of gun in which we know they have been used. As we can observe, although some of the trademarks were registered with the purpose of being used for pieces or material related to gunmaking, most of them were registered to be used for guns in general, or specifically for pistols and revolvers. Trademarks for shotguns were not so common.

<b>Table 5. Gunmaking trademarks and brands by product</b>		
AMMUNITION	7	1,0
POWDER	3	0,4
BARRELS	6	0,9
FRAME/ACTION BAR	1	0,1
LOCKS	1	0,1
CHOKE MAKERS	1	0,1
ENGRAVERS	1	0,1
POLISHERS	1	0,1
STOCKS	1	0,1
SPECIAL STEEL	1	0,1
<b>PIECES</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>3,2</b>
TARGET PISTOL	2	0,3
ALARM GUNS	1	0,1
CARABINES	13	1,9
GUN CANE	1	0,1
GUNS of any type	237	34,3
GUNS except shotguns	1	0,1
GUNS/AMMUNITION	17	2,5
GUNS/IRON FURNITURE	3	0,4
GUNS/TOOLS/MACHINES	2	0,3
PISTOLS	178	25,8
PISTOLS/REVOLVERS	12	1,7
REVOLVERS	101	14,6
REVOLVERS/SHOTGUNS	2	0,3
SHOTGUNS/PISTOLS	1	0,1
SHOTGUNS	61	8,8
<b>GUNS</b>	<b>632</b>	<b>47,0</b>
<b>NOT IDENTIFIED</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>5,1</b>
	690	100,0

It is interesting to remark some trademarks included in the first group regarding pieces. We have added here trademarks that were used by local gunmakers trade unions to fight against the pressure of bigger manufacturers. As we mentioned before at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the inner organization of the district still remembered that of the Royal Factories due to the subcontracting of smaller workshops by the bigger firms for the manufacturing of pieces. In order to avoid a negative lowering of prices the craft unions tried to regulate the market inside the district. That is why they registered a trademark for each of the main actions or processes needed to build a gun. The purpose of this measure was to oblige bigger factories not to use in their guns pieces that did not held the established mark, an action that somehow brought us back to the times of the guilds. These are the trademarks that were registered by unions in 1903.

**Table 6. Trademarks registered by gunsmiths' craft unions**

S.A.	Sociedad de acicaladores-choqueadores	Society of choke makers and primpers
S.G.	Sociedad de Grabadores	Society of engravers
S.B.	Sociedad de Basculeros	Society of action/frame makers
S.Cs.	Sociedad de Cañonistas	Society of barrelmakers
S.C.	Sociedad de Cajeros	Society of stoke makers
S.P.	Sociedad de Pulidores	Society of polishers
S.LL.E.X:	Sociedad de Obreros Llaveros de Ermua	Society of lockmakers of Eibar

By means of table 7 we try to show a chronological approach to the issue of trademarks in gunmaking industry. In some cases we do know the registry date of the trademark, in others, though we do not have any registry information we know when that brand was used and who the manufacturer of the handgun was. Thereby we can see that most of the trademarks were registered or at least used in the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Despite the high number of brands whose date we cannot thoroughly determine we consider that most of them can be also included in the 1910-1930 period.

**Table 7. Gunmaking trademarks and brands by year**

1883-1899	19	2,8
1900-1910	97	14,1
1911-1920	181	26,2
1921-1930	197	28,6
1931-1936	25	3,6
1940-1960	8	1,2
Not identified	163	23,6
	690	100,0

Maybe the reader is wondering what kind of brands were used by basque gun manufacturers. The truth is that it is difficult to systematize the diversity of trademarks just in a table so we will show some samples.

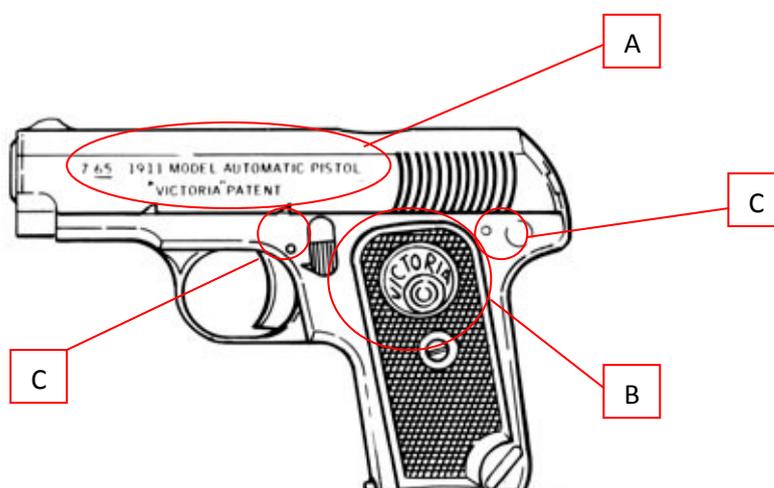
In the case of shotguns the use of Spanish language was more common and they usually referred to animals or hunting, usually with a drawing: FAISAN (Pheasant), LA PALOMA (The pidgeon), LA IMPERIAL (The Imperial), LA ESPECIAL (The special), SAN EUSTAQUIO, SIN RIVAL (without rival), EL PATO (the duck), LA SORDA (the woodcock), PARA TODOS (for everybody), LONGINES, EL CONEJO (the rabbit), EL LEON (the lion), EL CASTOR (the beaver), etc. Basque

was also used: GOGOR (hard), BETI-GOGOR (always hard), EDER (beautiful) or INDARDUN (powerful)<sup>23</sup>.

As pistols and revolvers were sold all over the world and firms did not want to show the real origin of the gun, foreign languages, especially English, was widely used. Sometimes the words used were not real English but resembled that language to non-english speakers and mistakes or misspellings were common<sup>24</sup>. Once the language was chosen<sup>25</sup> almost any topic could be used for a brand: mythology, geography, gun type, historical events or locations, etc. Here some examples: BRISTOL, WALMAN, PHOENIX, DIANE, HOPE, ALLIES, ESMIT (misspelling of Smith), RUBY SIX, ANGLO OTTOMAN, INDIAN, DOPOUGLAS, LOOKING GLASS, SHARP SOOTER, LIBERTY, PARAMOUNT, DREADNOUGHT, SCOTLAND, TRUST, ROYAL NOVELTY, POKER POSSESSIVE, THE BEST SHOOTING PISTOL, PATHFINDER, PROTECTOR etc.

For a better understanding of the case we will study in the following pages we think that some explanations are needed regarding the trademarks and the semiautomatic pistols. The drawing below shows us a standard Eibar type pistol made by *J. Esperanza and P. Unceta* on the eve of Great War.

The trademarks and, sometimes, commercial names could be seen in two places. On the slide (A) and on the grips (B)<sup>26</sup>. Since 1923, when testing guns at the Proof Bank became compulsory, the marks that denoted having passed the test were stamped on the frame (C).



<sup>23</sup> One of the oddest trademarks in basque language was EUSKAL SUARMA CHORI ILTZALLE ONENA IZENA MARTIAN DUENA which means 'Best bird killer basque firearm named Martian'. This trademark was registered by Martín Antonio Bascaran in 1914.

<sup>24</sup> Mistake, terrible

<sup>25</sup> One of the weirdest trademarks was DEK-DU that means 'twelve' in Esperanto. This trademark was used by Tomás de Urizar for revolvers between 1905 and 1912.

<sup>26</sup> Most of the acronyms were used for marking the grips.

The handguns were not always introduced in the market by the producers and sometimes they were sold to intermediaries. Depending on the market to which the guns would be sent the trader could ask the producer to mark the guns with a particular trademark of his own or anyone chosen for the moment. Sometimes the dealer bought the pistols in advance and did not know yet the market to where they were supposed to be sent. In those cases the trader could ask for 'neutral' pistols, that is to say, pistols without any kind of mark<sup>27</sup>. Later it was the intermediary company who marked the guns according to its interests.

## **5. The case of *ASTRA-Unceta y Cía.*<sup>28</sup>**

In the following pages we will try to identify some of the strategies regarding trademarks and guns followed by basque gun making firms through the case of this company. Although the firm lasted till the 1990s, we will just make a short explanation of its historical background in order to contextualize the brand issue at every moment.

### **5.1. History of *ASTRA-Unceta y Cía., S.A. (1908-1948)***

This company was founded in Eibar in 1908 by Juan Esperanza, a mechanic from Zaragoza, and Juan Pedro Uncetabarrenechea<sup>29</sup>, born in Eibar, and owner of an ironmonger's shop. The official name given to this general partnership firm was "Juan Esperanza and Pedro Unceta"<sup>30</sup> and the main aim established in the foundation document was the mechanical production of diverse articles and manufactures of iron and steel.

The workshop began working in 1911 manufacturing parts for other handgun manufacturers of the town though they also made some works adjusting parts for machine tools. After a year, the staff of the company reached sixteen workers and eight apprentices.

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<sup>27</sup> Sometimes they asked for pistols with neutral grips.

<sup>28</sup> Most of the information regarding this company comes from the biography published by the company in 1958, and the works published by Leonardo Antaris (1988, 2009) about Astra pistols. Part of the original files of the company, including letter copying books used here, are conserved by the Association Gernikazarra from Gernika-Lumo.

<sup>29</sup> Uncetabarrenechea is a basque compound surname that means approximately "the house inside the area full of ivy". In the case of those long basque names it is common to abbreviate them, so in this case, they used the shorter Unceta.

<sup>30</sup> Initially the company was called "Pedro Unceta y Juan Esperanza" but, due to a mistake, the position of names was changed. Unaware of the error, they only used the incorrect name so, when they found out the mistake, they decided to modify the legal name in 1914.

It was in 1911 when the manufacturing of complete pistols began. The model produced was based on the designs patented by Pedro Careaga and sold under the brand Victoria. The success of the sales consequently carried a fast increment of the labor staff which grew up to 120 workers in 1913. The prospects of the business improved when the retired military officer Venancio López de Ceballos, Count of Campo-Giro, came to an agreement with the company giving the manufacturing rights of his newly designed semiautomatic pistol. This was a good deal for the company because this pistol had just been declared service handgun by Spanish army.

In order to face this new challenge, and short of room in their facilities of Eibar, they decided to move to Gernika-Lumo (Bizkaia) where the local authorities had offered them a new building for free as an allowance<sup>31</sup>. The move to Eibar was not as peaceful as they probably thought when they planned it. Just three months after the arriving to Gernika-Lumo the workers started a strike that lasted for a month<sup>32</sup>. As a result of the strike almost all the staff returned to Eibar leaving the company in a very complicated situation<sup>33</sup>. Nevertheless the company managed to recover hiring and training local workers and resumed regular production throughout the following year.

Another consequence of the moving was that Rufino, one of the sons of Juan Pedro Unceta, replaced his father in the business<sup>34</sup>. Due to this change, not registered until 1919, the firm's name was altered to *Esperanza y Unceta*.

The favorable situation for basque gunmaking industry during the First World War enabled the firm to reach the highest production levels in its history. The sales made to french and italian governments reached over 100.000 units. We should add to this outcome the Campo-Giro pistols purchased by Spanish government which amounted to 13.617 units. It was during this conflict that the company started to use the brand Astra.

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<sup>31</sup> Later the owners founded or shared new companies in Gernika-Lumo such as *Talleres de Guernica S.A.* (machine tools and aviation bombs) and *Joyería y Platería de Guernica* (silverworks and cutlery).

<sup>32</sup> The main reason for the strike was that the owners had sacked one of the workers. Since stint work still ruled in Gernika-Lumo like in Eibar, this worker decided to go to Eibar on a free day and returned one day later to work because he had made part of that day's work in advance. Once returned the owners told him that his job was made now by another worker, one of the owners' nephew, and that he had to accept to be paid a wage instead of a price by piece. The worker did not accept since stint work was a right deserved by gunsmiths and the owners fired him. Etzaniz (2000).

<sup>33</sup> Only six of the 150 workers remained in the company after the strike. However, some of the strikers decided not to return to Eibar and established a new company by their own called *Alkartasuna, S.A.* who produced pistols during the following years. Etzaniz (2000).

<sup>34</sup> Juan Pedro Unceta remained in Eibar ruling his ironmongery business.

In 1921 one of the owners, Juan Esperanza, decided to abandon the firm and afterwards a new partner entered the company: Canuto Unceta, Rufino's cousin<sup>35</sup>. As a consequence the company had to change its name again becoming *Unceta y Compañía*.

During the interwar period, when gunmaking industry was immersed in a hard crisis, *Unceta y Cía.*'s strategy was to design high quality handguns for the government trials. The model submitted by this firm won the trial and the Astra 400 pistols was declared service pistol for the army in 1921. In the 1920s and 1930s this pistol and its reduce version, Astra 300, were also chosen by other spanish military and security institutions and by some latin-american armies as well. As we will see later, it was at that time when this company started to market pistols, revolvers and shotguns made by other manufacturers of Eibar and Ermua under its own trademarks.

Other handguns of this company with a remarkable success were those of the 900 series based on the german Mauser design. These pistols had a fire-selector device for fully automatic shooting and could be transformed into carbines by means of a detachable wooden stock. This product, specially designed for Chinese market, was so successful that the firm decided to establish a subsidiary firm in Shanghai in 1931, the Astra China Company, in order to market its guns in that country<sup>36</sup>.

After the breakdown of Spanish Civil War the activity of the factory was controlled by republican authorities and all the production was dispatched to the armed forces of the autonomous basque government. The infamous bombardment of Gernika-Lumo by the german Condor Legion in April 1937 did not affect to the facilities of the factory so that after the occupation of the town by Franco troops it was militarized and in a couple of months the production resumed. During the rest of the war the firm manufactured 28.000 pistols, 130.000 parts for machine guns and 347.000 pieces of diverse material.

After the war the new government approved new laws regarding gun production and only three companies received the permission to continue manufacturing guns, *Bonifacio Echeverría* (Eibar), *Gabilondo y Cía.* (Elgoibar) and *Unceta y Cía.* Spanish non-

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<sup>35</sup> We do not know why Juan Esperanza leaved the company but he established a new firm, Esperanza y Cía.. This company began to operate in Gernika-Lumo manufacturing handguns but soon moved to Markina-Xemein (Bizkaia) where manufactured mortars for the spanish army.

<sup>36</sup> *Unceta y Cía.* was not the only one who sold this kind of guns in China. *Bonifacio Echeverría* and *Beistegui Hermanos*, both of Eibar, also design their Mauser type pistols for that market. Goñi (2008, 2009a).

belligerent position during World War Two reduced the potential market for basque pistols to the Axis countries thus Germany was the only customer *Unceta y Cía.* had during the conflict, selling more than 100.000 pistols. In 1942 *Unceta y Cía.* was transformed in a limited company, but without any change in the identity of the owners.

At the beginning of the postwar era the situation of the company worsened. Due to the international isolation of Spain sales were limited to national market, and in this case, almost solely to official institutions. Furthermore *Unceta y Cía.*'s pistols lost the trial for a new service pistol for the army in 1946 which was won by *Bonifacio Echeverría*. In that moment the company suffered a deep transformation. The capital of the company was increased, new shareholders entered in the firm and a diversification program was implemented.

### **5.2. Looking for a brand: The Victoria pistols (1911-1914)**

As we have mentioned above, after being manufacturing pieces for other companies of Eibar, *J. Esperanza* and *P. Unceta* decided to start the production of complete pistols in 1911<sup>37</sup>. The pistol was based on the patent registered by Pedro Careaga in 1911 that, taking into account its characteristics, seems to be the first Eibar type pistol<sup>38</sup>. It also had a special feature patented by Juan Esperanza, a loaded chamber indicator named *Hope*<sup>39</sup>.

In order to ensure a good business *J. Esperanza* and *P. Unceta* marketed this new pistol through the firm *Eduardo Schilling S. en C.* of Barcelona, one of the most important gun trading companies in Spain. The deal agreed established that it would become the exclusive seller of the pistols in the Spanish and Portuguese markets in exchange for a monthly purchase of 1.500 units. Eduardo Schilling was an entrepreneur that had started his activity in gunmaking sector in the last years of 19<sup>th</sup> century owning a workshop in Eibar. Later he moved to Barcelona and established a factory that increased its size after adding his father-in-law's facilities to it<sup>40</sup>. Though since 1903 this firm's production was focused on fine shotguns it also stood out as an

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<sup>37</sup> They manufactured frames and magazines for Arizmendi y Goenaga and Martín Antonio Bascaran.

<sup>38</sup> Calvó (1997), pp. 151-152.

<sup>39</sup> By this indicator the shooter could easily know if the chamber of the gun had a cartridge inside or not. Calvó (1997), p. 188.

<sup>40</sup> Luis Vibes was a well known gunsmith of Barcelona.

important gun distributor in Spain together with another firm from Barcelona, *Beristain y Cía.*<sup>41</sup>.

The pistols were sold under the brand Victoria and they had a very good acceptance in the Spanish market. Thanks to the increasing demand the production and sale levels initially established were soon exceeded and new agreements had to be made between the two firms. This growth was not only a result of the higher Spanish demand but also a consequence of the exports to other European markets. *J. Esperanza y P. Unceta* still followed the same strategy conceding sale exclusiveness to other firms staying away from marketing processes. Thereby, Eduardo Schilling got the concession of French and German markets and another firm, *Thieme & Edeler*, obtained the exclusivity for Belgium and Austria. Adolf Thieme and Willy Edeler were two gun manufacturers of German origin located in Liège (Belgium) that, after First World War, moved to Eibar and established the gun trading firm *Sociedad Española de Armas y Municiones* (SEAM) which lasted at least until the breakdown of Spanish Civil War. After the war it was absorbed by the state owned *Unión Española de Explosivos*<sup>42</sup>.

The following table lets us observe the distribution of the sales made by *J. Esperanza y P. Unceta* among its customers. As we can see with the exception of those sales made in the factory itself or the scarce purchases made from the countries that were not under agreement, nearly the whole production was marketed by the two trading companies mentioned above<sup>43</sup>.

**Table 8. Sales distribution by customers**

	September-December 1912		January-May 1913	
	Pistol quantity	%	Pistol quantity	%
<i>Eduardo Schilling s. en C.</i>	3.705	56,40	5.599	53,25
<i>Thieme y Edeler</i>	2.787	42,43	4.793	45,59
<i>Others</i>	69	1,05	99	0,94
<i>J. Esperanza y P. Unceta (direct sales at the factory)</i>	8	0,12	23	0,22
<b>Total</b>	<b>6.569</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>10.514</b>	<b>100,00</b>

Source: Made by the author. Correspondence of *J. Esperanza y P. Unceta* 1912-1913. *Esperanza y Unceta Fund. AG.*

<sup>41</sup> Calvó (1997), pp. 305-306.

<sup>42</sup> Calvó (1997), pp. 317-319.

<sup>43</sup> In the case of sales made in factory, being Spain an exclusive market for E. Schilling, J. Esperanza and P. Unceta had to pay the profit to that company.

Regarding brands, and in order to sell *J. Esperanza y P. Unceta's* pistols, *Thieme & Edeler* registered *Victoria* and *Victoria Arms Co* trademarks in Belgium. But sometimes, as we have noted before, these trading companies asked the producers to stamp their own marks to the pistols and *Thieme & Edeler* was not an exception. Some of the pistols sent to this dealer were marked as *Dewaf* or *Belgium* hiding this way the Spanish origin of the pistols. As we have already explained, when a gun was imported from a country without compulsory proof bank to one that it did have, the guns had to pass some tests and after that they received the official stamp to be sold in that country. In order to avoid extra costs local guns were thoroughly tested before and after being completely finished, but for those coming from abroad the proofs were easier to pass. In these cases the officials of the bank just shot all the cartridges once, and although they were guns of less quality, they did not show any damage because some chemical processes executed at the end of the manufacturing reinforced the steel. In a long term most of these guns were not so reliable.

Even though *Victoria* pistols are considered of the best quality among the Eibar type pistols this strategy of deceiving the customers was also used. The most remarkable example of this strategy was the following inscription that was made to some pistols sent to *Thieme & Edeler*:

*Manufacture Liégeoise d'armes á feu-soc-du*

*Liège (Belgique) Patent N°51.350*

*E. Schilling* also sold pistols with other brands different to *Victoria*, but we cannot certify that those purchases were made following the same strategy. It could be that they only wanted to make them more attractive for some specific market, but in any case it is sure that they were not very predisposed to show the real origin of the guns. The brands used were *Muxi*, *Scott* and *Brunswick*.

The coexistence of these two trading companies was not as harmonious as the basque company would have desired. *E. Schilling* frequently complained about sales made by the belgian firm in territories assigned to him, especially in France. Once these infringements were proven the relation with *Thieme & Edeler* cooled and finally, in 1914, *J. Esperanza* and *P. Unceta* agreed to cancel the contract with that firm.

The success of *Victoria* pistols soon carried the menace of counterfeiting. The strategy of imitation was not only applied to foreign designs but also to other products of the district. Technical innovations, successful brands or emerging markets could hardly be kept in secret in such a small town in which workers of different factories were usually friends or relatives and where strong competition provided incentives to betrayal. This environment, which was not well seen by company owners as individuals, was the crucial factor that gave strength and competitiveness to the whole district.

On march 10<sup>th</sup>, 1914, Pedro Careaga wrote a letter to his patent agent, Gerónimo Bolibar, asking him to explore the possibility of suing two manufacturers under the accusation of counterfeiting<sup>44</sup>. This kind of problems also came out in the case of brands and it was an issue that concerned the manufacturers when they realized the registry of trademarks such as *Walki-Vincitor*, *Vincitor* or *Victoriosa*<sup>45</sup>.

But it was the *Victoria* trademark itself the source of some discussions between the manufacturers and the traders from Barcelona. At the beginning of the business Juan Esperanza and Pedro Unceta, while negotiating their agreement with *E. Schilling*, wondered what should be the brand of their new pistols and *E. Schilling*, among others, suggested *Victoria*. The manufacturers liked it and agreed to use that brand for their pistols. Later, when they tried to register it, they found that the trademark was property of *E. Schilling* since a few years ago.

Even though they tried to recover the trademark, *E. Schilling* refused to do it and asked for an exclusive use of the brand in Europe. As a result *J. Esperanza y P. Unceta* decided to use another brand for their products since they did not want to promote a brand that was not theirs. They chose *Astra*, the brand which will name almost all the products manufactured by the company for the rest of its life.

Even though at the beginning of the war they still sold some quantities of *Victoria* pistols to *E. Schilling*, but they tried to do the rest of the purchases with the *Astra* brand and most of the sales made during the war to France and Italy were

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<sup>44</sup> The pistols he complained about were the Titanic, made by Faustino Arteagoitia, and the Stossel, produced by Beistegui Hermanos. Letter sent by Pedro Careaga to Gerónimo Bolibar, Barcelona, 10<sup>th</sup> march 1914, Letter Copying Book n. 7, Esperanza y Unceta Fund. Gernikazarra Archive.

<sup>45</sup> Letter sent by J. Esperanza y P. Unceta to Eduardo Schilling, Barcelona, 7<sup>th</sup> april 1914, Letter Copying Book n. 7, Esperanza y Unceta Fund. Gernikazarra Archive.

executed this way. Nevertheless when trying to negotiate their first firm contract with french army in 1914, they were forced to offer their pistols under different brands. All the approaches to french government were made by several intermediaries each of them with a different representation contract. As a result the French government could have been offered different prices for the same pistol<sup>46</sup>. In order to avoid this type of interferences *J. Esperanza y P. Unceta* suggested to their representatives other brands such as *Stosel*, *Scoot* and *Marne*. The latter was a clear opportunistic reference to the battle in which the French troops stopped german advance in 1914. They also sold some neutral pistols to the French firm *Manufacture Française de'Armes et Cycles* of Sain Etienne for not military market. As a summary Table 8 shows us the trademarks and brands used by this company during this period.

**Table 8. Trademarks and brands used for J. Esperanza y P. Unceta pistols**

Trademarks registered (registry year)	Brands used by intermediaries	
Victoria (1911; rejected)	T.E.	Muxi
Fortuna (1911)	Manufacture liegeoise d'armes à feu	Salso
Hope, special dispositive (1912)	The automatic Lexton	Scoot
Indian ( 1914)	Brunswick	Caminal
Infalible (1914)	Marne	Indian
Astra (1914)		Infalible
La Pajarita (1915)		
Coq (1920)		

### **5.3.ASTRA: Building the brand (1921-1936)**

After the war *Esperanza y Unceta/Unceta y Cía* became one of the companies specialized as a supplier of spanish armed forces. As we noted, this firm manufactured the *Campo-Giro* pistol since 1913 to 1919 and then prepared another model to face the new trial of the new service pistol for the Spanish army. The new handgun, though designed by Pedro Careaga, resembled the *Campo-Giro* in some features especially in the tubular shape of the slide which became a distinctive characteristic of this company pistols<sup>47</sup>. *Esperanza y Unceta* was the winner of the trial and the *modelo*

<sup>46</sup> Letter by J. Esperanza y P. Unceta to Ponciano Azanza from Brussels, then in Bayonne, 9th october 1915, Letter Copying Book n. 13, Esperanza y Unceta Fund. Gernikazarra Archive.

<sup>47</sup> That is why these pistols were colloquially called 'puro' that is to say cigar. Ezell (1981), p. 539, Hogg y Weeks (1978), p. 245.

1921 became army's service pistol replacing the *Campo-Giro*. This pistol was sold commercially as *Astra 400*.

Following the army, other military and police institutions, which only used revolvers till that time, decided to adopt semiautomatic pistols as side guns for their members. In almost all the trials *Unceta y Cía.* was the winner except to that of *Guardia Civil*, the Spanish gendarmerie force, which was won by *Bonifacio Echeverría's Star model A* pistol<sup>48</sup>. This specialization in the design and production of high quality military handguns encouraged the company to offer its products to a wider range of governments, mainly Latin-Americans, winning trials in Ecuador, El Salvador and Colombia. These achievements provided to the company the opportunity to reinforce the brand. Every time they won the trials they asked the governments for official certifications of the results and the proofs made in order to use them as an asset for promotion.

Another indication of the fact that the firm was trying to build a distinctive brand was the change in the naming of its pistols adding a number to the *Astra* brand<sup>49</sup>. Thus they offered the *Astra 200*, a good quality Eibar type pistol; the *Astra 300*, a small version of the above-mentioned *Astra 400*; the *Astra 500*, the service signal-pistol in the army; the *Astra 700* a low quality pistol for militiamen and the *Astra 900* series, copies of the *Mauser* pistols. The *Astra 600* and *Astra 800* models were produced after the Second World War<sup>50</sup>.

The prestige obtained by winning those trials also gave the company an opportunity to implement other kind of business strategies. Taking advantage of the financial strength given by the profits earned during the war they started to act as intermediaries for other Basque manufacturers, offering a wide catalogue of guns such as pistols, revolvers or shotguns, gradually adding other products not directly related to gun making<sup>51</sup>. Most of these products were sold under *Astra* brand being the only exception some pistols and revolvers which bore *Union* brand. The low price Eibar type

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<sup>48</sup> Astra pistols became service handguns of the *Carabineros* (frontier guards) and Prison guard corps in 1921 and of the navy in 1923. The air force, once created as an independent entity in 1931, adopted the Astra 400 pistol too. Antaris (1988, 2009).

<sup>49</sup> They registered two new trademarks in 1923, *Nacional* and *España*, but they were not ever actually used.

<sup>50</sup> An Astra 600 pistol was offered at *Unceta y Cía.* catalogues in late 20s, but in all the books related to handguns this model is only mentioned for Second World War production.

<sup>51</sup> Some of these products (e.g. pliers and counter scales) were the result of diversification projects implemented by the firm.

pistols were named as *Astra 100*, *Astra 1000* or *Union*; the revolvers were called *Astra* or *Union* of 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> quality and the shotguns were given the *Astra* brand and numbers of the series 700 and 800<sup>52</sup>.

Even though these subcontracted products gave to the company the opportunity to enter in new markets and open chances for their own high quality handguns, the firm had to face the risk of the discredit that the low quality of some of them could carry. They usually received complaints of guns that did not function properly.

Other problem came from the Proof Bank of Eibar. Since 1923 the proofs became compulsory and these subcontractors had to prove their guns in that establishment before sending them to Gernika-Lumo. The Proof Bank was reluctant to stamp the official marks to any pistol proved there under brands not owned by the manufacturer itself. The way *Unceta y Cía.* suggested to overcome any trouble was to use neutral handles and that the subcontractor slightly stamped its initials on the frame, a mark that afterwards could be easily erased in Gernika-Lumo<sup>53</sup>. These precautions were also extended to 'Eibar' as the place where the guns were manufactured so that the customers would not doubt that those handguns were actually manufactured in Gernika-Lumo<sup>54</sup>. By that time there were not ashamed of the Spanish origin of their guns and always stamped the legend *Unceta y Compañía-GUERNICA (Spain)* on their pistols.

In order to be consequent with the wide variety of products they offered in their catalogues, *Unceta y Cía.* used to introduce itself as a big manufacturer and when foreign dealers visited the factories the owners used to show them the nearby *Talleres de Guernica* and *Joyería y Platería de Guernica* as if they were all parts of the same factory. That is what they did when unexpectedly one of their Japanese customers went to pay a visit to the factory<sup>55</sup>.

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<sup>52</sup> The model numbers were 720, 730, 740, 750, 760, 780, 790, 800, 801, 804, 805, 810, 811, 820, 821, 830, 831. We have references of the use of the numbers 1000, 2000 and 3000 for shotguns as well.

<sup>53</sup> Letter by *Unceta y Cía.* to Norberto Arizmendi, Eibar, 15th December 1930, Letter Copying Book n. 81, *Unceta y Cía. Fund*, Gernikazarra Archive.

<sup>54</sup> Letter by *Unceta y Cía.* to Tomás Urizar, Eibar, 9th December 1936, Letter Copying Book n. 81, *Unceta y Cía. Fund*, Gernikazarra Archive.

<sup>55</sup> "In the meantime we had the pleasure to receive the visit of your Mr. Ohashi, to whom we have shown our Departments for fabrication of firearms, materials of War and of german silver goods and we hope that he will have the best impressions. We are very sorry indeed that we were not able to make us understand about the different topics of importance and we hope to receive by an early mail your extensive informations. Your letter in which you announced us that Mr. Ohashi does not understand any foreign language (of the 9th Octbr.) arrived us the 8th. Inst. and as we did receive the visit already the 1st inst. we were not advised at due time to search a person who can

#### 5.4. *Royal pistols for Japan*

One of the ways the company found to get over the crisis the gun making industry was suffering in the 20s was to extend its operations to new markets slightly explored the years before. Due to this strategy the firm began to sell pistols, most of them subcontracted Eibar type models, to Japanese trading companies, most of them of the city of Kobe<sup>56</sup>. *Unceta y Cía.* was not the only basque manufacturer operating at that market, being *Beistegui Hermanos* of Eibar the main competitor there.

For these sales to the Asiatic market *Unceta y Cía.* initially used the brand Royal. Apparently they thought that this trademark was not registered yet or, at least, that the former owner did not paid the fees for the renewal. But in fact this trademark was registered by *Beistegui Hermanos* its main competitor in that market.

But the industrial district of Eibar was not the best place to keep a secret and eventually it was revealed. *Alday y Cía.* was the main supplier of handles for the basque handguns manufacturers and both *Unceta y Cía.* and *Beistegui Hermanos* bought *Royal* branded handles there. One day, unadvisedly, the owners of *Alday y Cía.* commented to *Beistegui Hermanos* that *Unceta y Cía.* was purchasing these handles and consequently they asked for an amendment<sup>57</sup>. Initially *Unceta y Cía.* tried to come over the obstacles imposed by *Beistegui Hermanos* sending the handles to Japan from other country but finally they had to accept an agreement. In that deal they renounced not only to sell any pistol under the brand Royal but also to claim for any compensation that the damages that any previous patent usurpation made by *Beistegui Hermanos* might have generated to *Unceta y Cía.*. In exchange *Beistegui Hermanos* would not pursue any legal action against them.

This situation was difficult to manage for *Unceta y Cía.*. They had already established a steady relation with some japanese traders and they were not eager to change the brand for which they had invested so much money<sup>58</sup>. However the

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speak Japanese”, Letter by *Unceta y Cía.* to The Ohashi Trading Company, Kobe, 17<sup>th</sup> November 1926, Letter Copying Book n. 62, *Unceta y Cía.* Fund, Gernikazarra Archive.

<sup>56</sup> See Goñi (2008, 2009a)

<sup>57</sup> Letter by *Unceta y Cía.* to *Alday y Cía.* from Eibar, 5th July 1926, Letter Copying Book n. 60, *Unceta y Cía.* Fund, Gernikazarra Archive.

<sup>58</sup> “As we did inform you in our letter of the 14<sup>th</sup> inst. already now we are unable to furnish you the auto. pistol 7,65 9:10 shots with brand ROYAL and therefore we hope you will not have inconvenient in receiving this same pistol with brand ASTRA or any other of those we cited in our above cited letter. Being the pistol completely the same one as well referring quality as performance, finish, weight etc. we are quite sure that you will be able to interest your

demand continued increasing and this business turn into one of the most outstanding stories of the history of basque gun making industry.

In 1927 *Unceta y Cía.* sent Ernest Borchers, its newly hired export manager, to Japan in order to strengthen the commercial ties with their Japanese customers and to obtain a better knowledge of that market. After a long travel trough Europe and Asia he arrived to Japan and met those japanese clients to realize that they were just acting as re-exporters. The final destination of the guns was not Japan but China that was immersed in a civil war known as the Warlord Era<sup>59</sup>. He also realized that the most demanded gun in that country was the Mauser type pistols and that two of their competitors, *Beistegui Hermanos* and *Bonifacio Echeverría*, were already aware of it. This gun used a powerful cartridge and it had a detachable shoulder stock. Due to these features, being a pistol, it could be sold as a commercial gun into China getting over the embargo imposed by international powers. However, once the stock was attached to it, the pistol was transformed into a carbine and it could be used as a war weapon.

As a result of it the three basque companies developed their own copies of the Mauser pistol with detachable shoulder stock. Although the caliber and external shape of the pistol were the same, internally the mechanics were different<sup>60</sup>. Furthermore, they developed a device that provided a full automatic fire option that transformed the pistol in a sub-machine gun. Later new features were added as a detachable 20 shot magazine or a rate of fire retarder<sup>61</sup>. By this way they technically improved the original model at a lower cost than the german manufacturer<sup>62</sup>.

In the case of *Unceta y Cía.* its best customer was Chan Kai Shek's government of Nanking and in order to ease the business they decided to create a subsidiary firm in Shanghai, the *Astra China Company*. The sales made through this firm reached more than 50.000 \$ between july 1932 and july 1933<sup>63</sup>. The correspondence related to this

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clients to buy this pistols in spite of those with brand ROYAL", Letter by *Unceta y Cía.* to Ohashi Trading Company from Kobe, 30 august 1926, Letter Copying Book n. 60, *Unceta y Cía.* Fund, Gernikazarra Archive.

<sup>59</sup> Chan (1982) and Lary (1985).

<sup>60</sup> Since the Mauser c96 pistol was an old gun the copy of the external shape of the gun did not suppose any patent infringement. Bonifacio Echeverría did not follow the two others and only adapted one of his models to the Mauser caliber also adding a detachable wooden stock.

<sup>61</sup> Mortera (1997) and Nelson and Musgrave (1981).

<sup>62</sup> The German company's production was limited according to Versailles Treaty.

<sup>63</sup>

company finished in 1934 so it seems that it lasted only for three years and the reasons why this company was definitively shut down are not very clear.

#### **5.5.ASTRA-Unceta y Cía.(1952)**

During the first years after the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) the *Unceta y Cía.* had to face some difficulties. Since it was already the only pistols supplier of the army the company still remained mobilized, that is to say under military control, and the commercial trade was forbidden. Soon, after hard negotiations, the prohibition was released and the company could get profits selling guns to the Axis. The firm could go ahead with this business so successfully because it had almost none competitors in Spain. The Spanish government only gave permission to resume gun manufacturing to those factories that could carry the whole production process into the same factory. So, the traditional subcontracting system was cut off by the new legislation. Only three companies fulfilled the new requirements: *Bonifacio Echeverría, Gabilondo y Cía.* and *Unceta y Cía.*, and only the latter was in condition to respond to the handguns demand coming from Germany. The first purchase was made in 1940 and the last one in 1944, reaching a total of 106.454 pistols<sup>64</sup>. *Bonifacio Echeverría* could finally enter in the business and sold 45.965 pistols, most of them to Germany but also some quantities to Bulgaria<sup>65</sup>.

The confluence of several factors at the end of Second World War brought great complications to the firm. As a result the company had to make some relevant decisions regarding the business strategy and the structure of the company.

One of the most important factors was the abrupt reduction of exports due to the defeat of Nazi Germany in the war and the economic blockade established by allied countries to the francoist Spain during those years. The situation in the national market was not better. The Spanish army called for a new service pistol trial and this time, after thirty years of victories, the pistol submitted by *Unceta y Cía.* was defeated by *Bonifacio Echeverría's* Star pistol. Thereby this company, which also manufactured sub-machines guns, became the main light weaponry supplier for the Spanish military and police forces until 1980s.

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<sup>64</sup> Antaris (1988)

<sup>65</sup> Antaris (2001)

With almost no trade neither abroad nor in the home market that was limited to scarce individual sales *Unceta y Cía.* faced an untenable situation. During these two years the production did not stop and the stores of the factory were full of unsellable pistols. Eventually new investors came to rescue the company, the most important was the *Banco de Vizcaya*, one of the principal banks of the region. The new capitals were used to implement a productive diversification project in order to reduce the weight of the guns in the company's business. The products chosen were pneumatic tools such as jackhammers for mining and public works and accessories for textile machinery. Both new production lines would be developed under licenses of foreign origin. The first one was selected because it could be adapted well to the features of the factory and because of the needs they had detected in the home market. This production suffered some problems to receive the necessary permission by Spanish government but finally it was permitted in 1948. The second one was chosen due to the scarcity of that kind of pieces in the market. Those textile accessories were imported before but then they were not produced in Spain at the level of quality needed. This project received the government permission in 1947.

The effects of the addition of these new products on the company sales were immediate. By 1948 the guns reduced their presence in firm's sales to the 28,5 per cent while the new fabrications reached together the 48,1 per cent<sup>66</sup>. All those new products were also sold under the brand *Astra*. This diversification process asked for more investment and the social capital of the company was increased from 5 million pesetas to 7,5 million pesetas in 1950, and afterwards augmented again to 22,5 millions. This growth did not change the shareholding structure of the company since the new shares were acquired by the former partners. As an ultimate upgrade of the *Astra* brand the Board of Directors of the company decided to change its name to *ASTRA-Unceta y Cía., S.A.* in 1952<sup>67</sup>. Since that time everyone in Gernika-Lumo and in the whole Basque Country uses the name *Astra* to refer to the company and the factory itself. *Astra* continued being the brand of the company until it was definitively shut up in 1997.

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<sup>66</sup> The 22% was related to the products sold as intermediaries and 1,4% corresponded to the sale of store surpluses.

<sup>67</sup> The other two competitors made the same decision becoming *LLAMA-Gabilondo y Cía.* and *STAR-Bonifacio Echeverría*.

## 6. Conclusions

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the basque gunmaking sector was structured as an industrial district conformed by several small and medium size companies. These workshops and factories did not manufacture such a wide variety of products and, taking advantage of the opportunities gave by Spanish legislation, their main strategy was to sell cheap copies of foreign successful handgun models. As a result two kind of needs appeared. On the one hand they had to differentiate their products for their competitors' ones which carried a proliferation of brands and trademarks. On the other hand, as gradually basque guns started to attract bad reputation in the markets for their low quality and poor reliability, they tried to hide their origin using brands expressed in foreign or not easy recognizable languages.

The case of *J. Esperanza y P. Unceta's* early years demonstrated that sometimes this strategy was not only followed due to manufacturer's decision but also the demands of the intermediaries and traders. In the case of the Victoria pistols we saw that the firm had a firm intention to build its own brand.

The specialization in the supplying of ordnance guns gave to Unceta y Cía. the opportunity to get an external independent judgement of their products. Letting aside the significance that the government purchases could have had for the revenues of the company, it is evident that by this way the firm obtained a reputation for its brand that gave the opportunity to act as a successful gun dealer. Thanks to the credit acquired they could extend their operations to other products different to guns.

Another behaviour that we have ascertained is that the gun making companies tended to use brands in their products before registering them as happened in the case of *Victoria* and *Royal* brands. It seems that the registry came once the brand had displayed some level of efficiency in the market and not earlier.

Finally, as a final reflection, we think that it is necessary to explain some facts related to the brand that we consider relevant from a long term point of view. The *Astra-Unceta y Cía.'s* factory, after its closure in 1997, stood abandoned for years and the regional government plans were to bring it down in order to build houses. On December 25<sup>th</sup> 2005 a group of youngsters of Gernika-Lumo entered in the factory and occupied the building and a social movement called *Astra Gernikentzako* (Astra for Gernika in basque) started. The people leading this movement thought that the

factory's facilities should be used for public service and that the future purpose for the building should be decided by the people of the town. Some years later a cultural project came to reality: *Astra Kulturarako Fabrika Soziala* (Astra social factory for culture)<sup>68</sup>. So, the gun making factory disappeared in Gernika but the brand still remains. Furthermore the *Astra* trademark has returned some years ago as a gun brand in Switzerland. *Astra defense* company introduces itself as the genuine descendant of a long tradition started in the Basque Country<sup>69</sup>.

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<sup>68</sup> <http://www.astragernika.net/>

<sup>69</sup> <http://www.astra-arms.ch/>

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