French Cuirassier swords AN IX - AN XI

By N.Vasse

"The cuirassiers weapon is the queen of movements and its usefulness is before , during and after the battle" *Napoléon Bonaparte*

Figure 1 [13]: A blue cloth jacket, a gray trousers with calf skin, big horse boots, a helmet surmounted by a black horsehair - decorated with a Gorgon whose petrified his enemies, a armour of the Zuderell house in Paris weighing 6.8 kg, a long straight sword called "latte"- so these men over 1.70m , nicknamed by Napoleon "big brother", will write their names in the legend of the cavalry.

The role of the cuirassiers cavalry was to be in reserve during the battle, they waited to disrupt the adversaries ranks at the right time - It's the reason why Napoleon was furious against general Ney to have engaged the cuirassiers two hours too early in the battle of Waterloo.

Cuirassiers with the Carabineers had a similar role; they were called reserve or heavy cavalry.

The idea of creating a heavy breaking cavalry was born in the brain of the first Consul after the battle of Marengo. Having observed the efficiency of General Kellermann cavalry, cutting the Austrian infantry in half - Bonaparte understood the important potential of a mass of cavalry charging at the

right time.

A quote from the Duke of Wellington:

"Napoleon won some battle using his cuirassiers as a sort of accelerated infantry, supported by masses of guns, he had a habit of seizing large portions of the center or wing position of the enemy and occupy enemy before his infantry could come to meet them. "

The birth of the cavalry specialized "Cuirassier" is dated October 10, 1801. The 1st and 8th Cavalry Regiment are integrated into this new corps - only the 8th Regiment was carrying armour and was called "Cuirassier of King " before the Revolution, they had kept the armour as an almost honorary title. Therefore the first Cuirassier regiment will have this armour too. In October 1802 the 2nd, 3rd and 4th regiments are created, then 5th, 6th, 7th regiments a year later. In March 1807, the regiments were composed of five squadrons of two companies, each company consisting of three officers and 102 troopers. The cuirassiers were the most expensive branch of the cavalry to equip and maintain. This is perhaps why it never exceeded twelve regiments , that is 4123 cuirassiers (26 % of all heavy cavalry including dragoons) [20].

The technique of the "charge", as practiced by the heavy cavalry, ranged according to circumstances and the nature of combat troops. A routine manoeuvre was the attack line: squadrons of the regiment were aligned next to each other. The most common training for the squadron was deployed in two rows.

The successive wave was another method of attack, the leading squadron hitting before the following. Some theorists advocated that this charge was good against infantry, because they thought the leading squadron absorbed fire, while others were able to break the infantry before they had time to reload.

Another formation, very popular during the wars of the Revolution, was the attack in column, where the squadrons followed one after the other. Although useful for inexperienced riders (an attack in column, performed at the trot is easier to control), this technique was later recommended against the heavy cavalry and infantry in column .

If circumstances permitted, the charge started slowly, then gradually accelerated to a trot and finally a gallop just before striking the enemy. During the approach, the rider had to look to the horse's neck for protection from fire, then stand on his stirrups, waving his sword and cry - "Vive l'empereur". This was the common practice.

A Heavy cavalry attack had a hypnotic effect on the opponent, the power and its size, was compared with gorgonians of Greek mythology. Let's hear from a British soldier :

"We waited an infantry charge, our lines were ready, little affected by artillery fire. Suddenly I saw the sergeant who was inspecting the alignment stopping. I did not understand why - until I got a tingling down the leg. Then the ground seemed to convulse.

I was seized with anxiety. On our left front, the cannon began to thunder. My neighbor, veteran Millan, opened his mouth as if to protest but suddenly lost his voice, he let fall his clay pipe, he did not pick it, as if petrified.

I saw on his face like a band of light. Then, the entire first row we were part, seemed to illuminate chips. Straight ahead, a compact mass of cavalry came out. Breastplates, helmets, swords flashing in the sun , splashing our red clothes with metallic sheen. Then turning my head and at the same time that I saw, I heard someone I presume officer order the square position. The order was more than screamed, almost barked. Almost turning to the petition, he woke men petrified by the spectacle. Although the noise was deafening, however, we heard the "Vive l'Empereur". A condition of not being in our place, the show was great. "

Figure 2 [17] :The sabre in action. This ink demonstrates the manner in which the sabre was wielded in the charge, and secondly what became of the well dressed lines once the charge got under way. The trooper therefore leaned well forward in the saddle, right arm thrust out as far as it's would stretch with sabre continuing the plunge towards the enemy; in this illustration the trooper's elbows are bent to a rather marked degree whereas, in fact, they would be trained never to bend the sword arm lest the enemy's edged weapons slide off their sabre guard and amputate the elbow.

The only weapon used during a battle by cuirassiers was the sword so it took considerable importance. It was generally considered that the blow of a sword thrust was more lethal than a cut which was considered preferable in single combat. The sword was the cuirassiers key weapon. The cuirassier sabre was about the same length as a polo stick with which riders had no difficulty hitting a small ball on the floor, this long length allowed many feats of combat. [20].

Captain Wallace of the 1st English Dragoon guards said : "*When charging at Waterloo, a French cuirassier trumpeter was passed lying on the ground. Few of the regiment forbore to have a slash at their fallen enemy as they galloped past. I did not slash at him but the trumpeter slashed at me with his sword*".

When in 1812 they received carbines they made considerable effort to avoid carrying them. According to regimental inspections only 20 % had pistols but all had a sword.

The genealogy of the Cuirassier Sword

The "Heavy" cavalry troops were equipped before 1802-1803 (An XI) with a saber called "à fleurons (florets)" 1784 model - an IV model after revolution - with its double fullered blade (in use since 1779 in the French cavalry) and 1.13 m long. This blade was abandoned for a flat blade [1].

Photo 1: Sword Florets model 1784 cavalry double fullered blade - the model year XI and IX have an identical cap, without the hole.

Curiously, the hilt of year IX model which became the sword of the new cavalry corps had its genealogy from the weapons of the military household of the King, particularly from the sword of the king bodyguards (the only fighting company of the "inside" guard of the king house). In 1784, this elite corps of the king, were dissolved by the revolution, just before, they received a sword innovation for which we do not know the inspiration

The sword was chosen by the artillery Committee during the revolutionary period with probably the influence of Liorard, furbisher, who is the manufacturer of the Marechausée swords , the sword chosen had similar characteristics .

Photo 2: Sword of the "Marechaussée" from Liorard a manufacturer , inspired from the bodyguards of the king swords - A flat blade but hilt without leather.

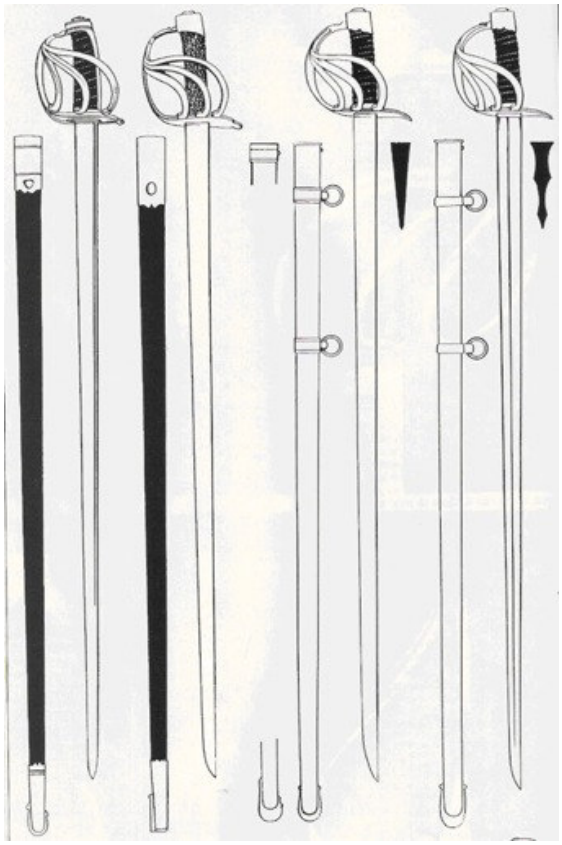


Figure 3: Origin and evolution of the cuirassier sword, the first on the left is the sword of the king's bodyguards 1784 - the second is the sword of Marechaussée , that became the Gendarmerie (recovering in 1791 the name of the famous troops from the Kings household Guard dissolved in 1788) - the third is the model An IX and fourth model An XI (or XIII). The first 3 are rarities for the collector.

AN IX and AN XI Cuirassier sword

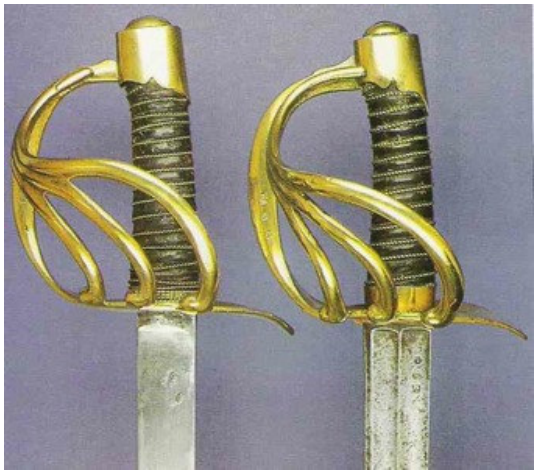


Photo 3: Saber An IX on the left and An XI on the right.

AN IX MODEL : Straight flat blade and a flat-edged back edge, point in line . Brass hilt , 3 lateral branches, ending in a button and handle covered with leather , wire widely spaced (17 turns without counting the 4 towers near the base). Sheet iron scabbard. Mouth piece designed to focus the blade (with screws), bracelets/rings, and large flat iron drag looking like a "lyre music instrument"

AN XI MODEL : Straight double fullered blade and a flat-edged back edge, point in line . Brass hilt , 3 lateral branches, ending in a button and grip covered with leather , wire widely spaced (12 turns), ferrule. Sheet iron scabbard. Mouth piece designed to focus the blade (with screws), bracelets, and large iron drag looking like "lyre music instrument"

Photo 4 : Scabbard an IX left and an XI right

Table1 :

COMPARATIF	AN IX	AN XI
LAME longueur largeur au talon	Plate 970-973 mm 9,3 -9,7 mm	A double pan creux 974,5 mm 10,1 mm
FOURREAU Longueur Epaisseur bracelets	Avec Alaises bois 990 à 1008 mm 22,5-24,5 mm	Avec fût bois 1006,9 13-13,5
MONTURE hauteur	pas de virole ou <7mm 157 à 162 mm	virole 12mm 159 mm
GENERALITE Longueur total poids total poids sabre nu poids fourreau nu	1130 à 1165 mm 1940 a 2190 gr 1240 à 1310 gr 680 à 920 gr	1165 mm 3197 gr 1417 gr 1780 gr

Chronology

The year IX saber is finally adopted. With it's specific hilt it was put into production under the responsibility of General Gassendi designated by the first consul. This sword had two major problems : a heavy flat blade and a fragile metal scabbard, which when deformed by a hoof of a horse or any other event, traps the blade [10] .

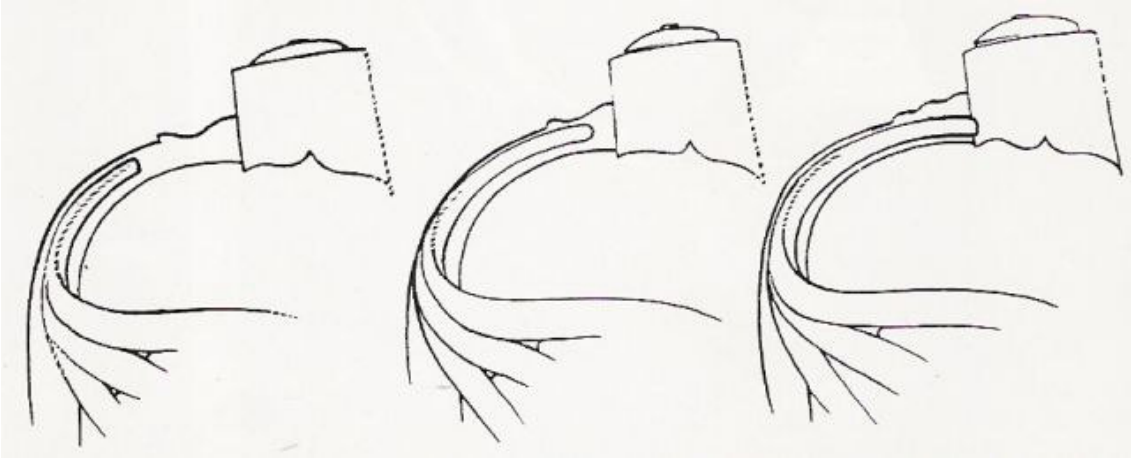
The Minister of War Berthier met the Artillery Committee in the year XI to remedy these defects. The saber pattern An XI was born with a solid and lighter blade , the scabbard was reinforced with a glued wooden barrel. This sword was manufactured from 1808.

It in turn was replaced by the model 1816 heavy cavalry, then the 1822 pattern for heavy cavalry called "bancal" . More later by 1854,1882 and 1896 pattern.

Photo 5: Cuirassier wearing a Year IX - note the absence of the bayonet to the cuirassier belt of that period.

For the period of the first empire we never talk of a model year XIII, we talk about the saber year XI. The saber year IX is modified in the year XI (1802-1803) and amended by weapons regulations in the year XIII (1805-1806) We cannot talk about a new model, these were just 2 different ways of saying the same thing.

There is no difference between year XI and XIII, only small changes , some fragile elements of the sword changed a little due to experience from the incessant wars of the empire [10].



Draw 4: Appearance of small cap and fusion of three branches - At left , the first model is typical of AN IX, the last 2 correspond to XI AN model, this zone was a point of weakness that will gradually become stronger.

The Master gunsmith Eperonniers (“spur manager") of the regiment performed frequent repairs and the saber year IX often received a ‘XI’ stronger hilt (therefore year IX hilts are rare).

It is also rare to find unmodified blades , only swords there were captured by the enemy or put out of action escaped the 1816 blade evolution [14] - Blades that were picked up on the battlefield did not undergo this change. Swords AN IX / XI which survived the empire and were still in service during the restoration, then underwent changes in 1816 (blade shortened to 95cm and given a spear point).

We do sometimes see empire cuirassiers sabers reassembled with a 1816 hilt and even later. After exhausting the store of 1816 pattern hilts, all heavy cavalry saber models 1822, 1816 or Year XI, which needed a hilt, receiving the model 1854 hilt (25,000 year XI were still in action in July 1870! ... especially with Dragoons [15]).

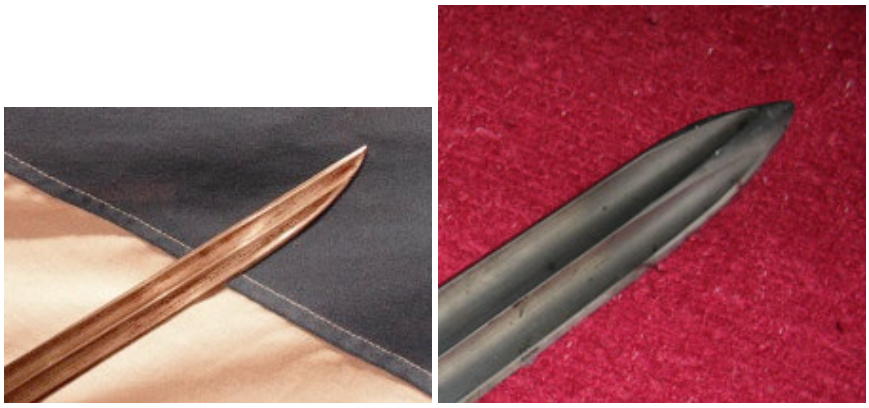


Photo 6 : On the left the blade point before 1816 – On the right, after 1816, the 1816 pattern will be distributed in 1819, after all the old year XI and IX were modified.

Regarding the scabbard , we can recognize 3 different types - the scabbard year IX (criticized for its fragility), an XI (with wood cylinder, therefore heavier) - these two had a side screw. The scabbard model year XI was criticized and many cuirassiers would have liked the dragoon troopers leather scabbard (year XI pattern for the Dragons), the strength of the scabbard year XI was accused of being particularly dangerous when a horse fell. Finally, a 3rd scabbard can be recognized, this one is called the "1816 Model", in fact it seems that this scabbard was in use from 1814 (as evidenced by the relics of year XI swords found on the battlefields of Waterloo [4]) and in use for swords in service during the restoration period. This scabbard combined a light weight (with rivets on the side) with strength [7]. On the scabbard the drag is symmetrical; it looked like a "lyre" (music instrument) on the previous scabbards.

Photo 7: Left: scabbard 1816, a bowl of 3mm preventing the exit of blade by friction - Right: View of a bowl set version 1816 fixed with 2 rivets .

Scabbard Drag in " lyre" form of a An XI/IX scabbard - with Klingenthal "poinçon" (rare) - the 1816 pattern scabbard have a symmetrical drag

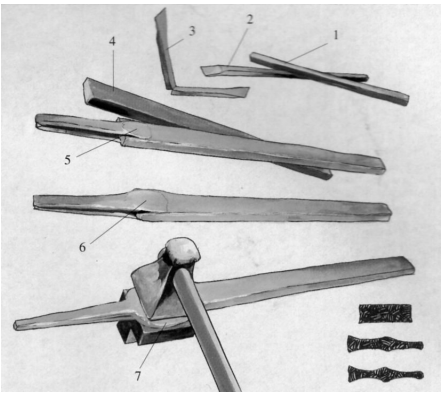
The Manufacturing and Markings [9,11,12]:

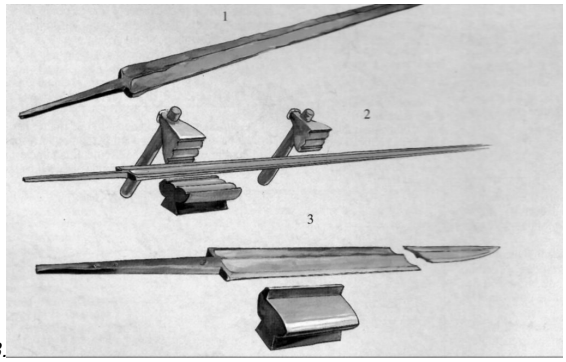
Swords An IX, An XI all have blades from the Klingenthal factory and markings follow the standards of that factory. The sword year XI was manufactured until 1817.

Some very rare blades ware marked AP (workshop - Atelier de precision) these blade were used by the inspectors of the factories (Order of 1 August 1794) to do their work . Also very rare is the blade from another model (1790, Officer Solingen blade ...) or another factory rebuilt with AN XI hilt - these are more probably from the last century and rebuilt for commercial reasons ...

A collector should buy blades with Klingenthal marks to be confident in their purchase.

After forging the blade, tempering and sharpening , each blade had to pass dimension controls (using a template) and bending tests before being approved and stamped by the inspector and the control worker. These steps were very strictly carried out by quality people. Always the same, they were the way that a soldier could totally trust his martial tool. This required very special expertise and this work is recognizable by collector's .

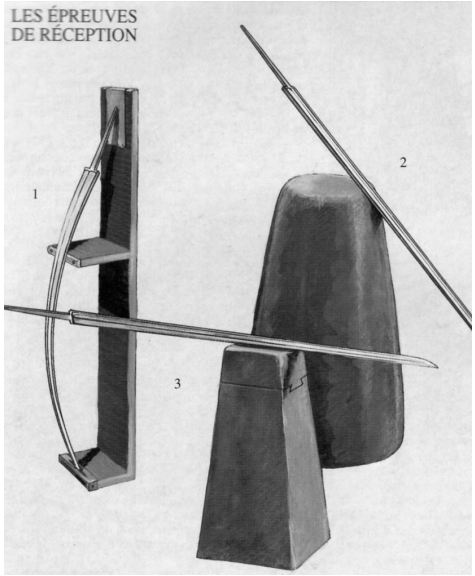
A. 

B. 

Photos 5 and 6 : Sequence of operations for forging a sword AN XI:

A] .1, 2 and 3 a piece of metal will be transformed into "Soie" - (Silk / hilt metal part) - 4.5 the "Soie" is then placed over the piece that will serve to make the blade 6.7- Blade transformation

B]. Draft a double fullered pan and longer blade - 2 Creation of double fullered pan - 3 Creation of the back edge and the edge.



Draw 7 : Acceptance Controls: Blades are finished, after testing for size (it allows 4.5 mm difference) , they are subjected to a review by the reviewer assisted by a controller under the supervision of an inspector (artillery officer representing the state) - 1 Bending. The blade is bent and the blade is destroyed if it fails the test - 2 Elasticity. The blade is bent to 45 °, the tip must touch the foot of the block - 3. Knock on the back and sharpness. A sample of one of 5 blades has onje of three tests based on the activity of the factory.

The metal engraver finally finished the job by writing in cursive letters on the back edge of the sword. The worker ensures quality, because if the blade is refused, he is not paid. To further complicated things , some swords were retested a second time and received new punches ... [19]

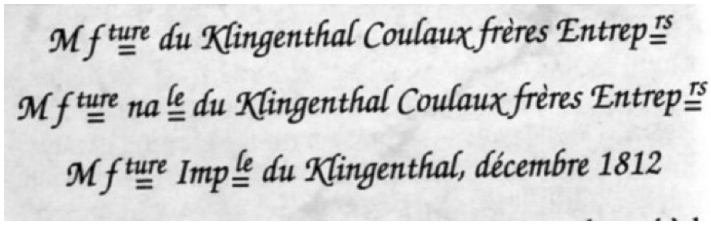


Figure 8 : All blades for the troopers year XI and IX were made in the factory du Klingenthal. Following the marking rules of the factory, they are marked on the back edge of the blade - the three options for marking these swords are illustrated here , month and year are noted from the beginning of 1811 (the Order is 1810, but was adopted later) probably in March 1811 [9]. We find in the period of 100 days and during the first restoration period (Rle = Royal) -ex: Mfure rle du Klingenthal ... - from

April 1814 until probably May 1815, again Imple during a very short time and of course, Rle after.

Figure 9 :The language of punches - Only these type of marking from the factory of Klingenthal are possible on the swords year XI / IX. There was already a true traceability from the Klingenthal factory markings. Fantasy, unclear, poorly placed, not corresponding to the time, blackened or missing marks were not possible from this manufactory.

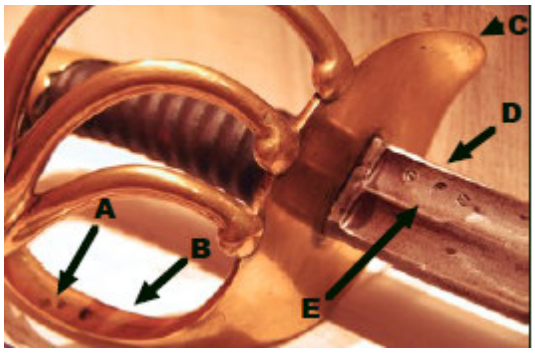
Swords were made for half of the production at the factory Boutet of Versailles and the other half at the manufacture of Klingenthal, by order of 1 September 1800 which was given to Mr. Boutet for a period of 18 years. This penalized Klingenthal by requiring is to send to Versailles half of its blades. The hilts received punches by the regulatory controller of the assembly factory (Versailles or Klingenthal). You sometimes see punches that are not the same between the hilt and the blade. This can occur in two circumstances - of course if the hilt is mounted at Versailles (Klingenthal blade and Versailles hilt), but also where the hilt has been replaced [9].

The hilts are a mixture of arco (mixing copper, coal and zinc) and bronze from cannons. Moulds are used and the hilts are then put to the test and presented by the worker to the Controllers before being deposited to the store[14].

In addition they could add the regimental markings on the main branch of the Guard. This mark probably started at the end of the empire in numbered cavalry corps. They did it systematically at the restoration period in the Cavalry Corps and continued until March 1854 [5] (remember that many swords were active long after the end of the empire and were then marked).

The total production of cuirassiers cavalry sword was 15,199 units of type An IX starting in 1803 and then 54,640 units of XI from 1807 until 1817 without interruption [10].

Summary of markings places



***E**: Punches of the manufacture of Klingenthal (required) - Note the location that never changed - D: Back edge (mandatory) - Marking Manufacture du..*

***A**: Manufacturing Marking(required) on the right: Manufacturer of Versailles on the left: manufactory of Klingenthal Marking.*

*From left to right - **B**. Regimental Marking (optional). **C**. Manufacturing Marking (required) (On the left, the manufacture of Versailles marking / On the Right, the manufacture of Klingenthal marking)*

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Thank you for reading.

Officer of the 1st Regiment of cuirassiers. Represented in armor pierced by a spear, he takes his horse by the bridle. Pastel signed "Mouton" and dated 1819.