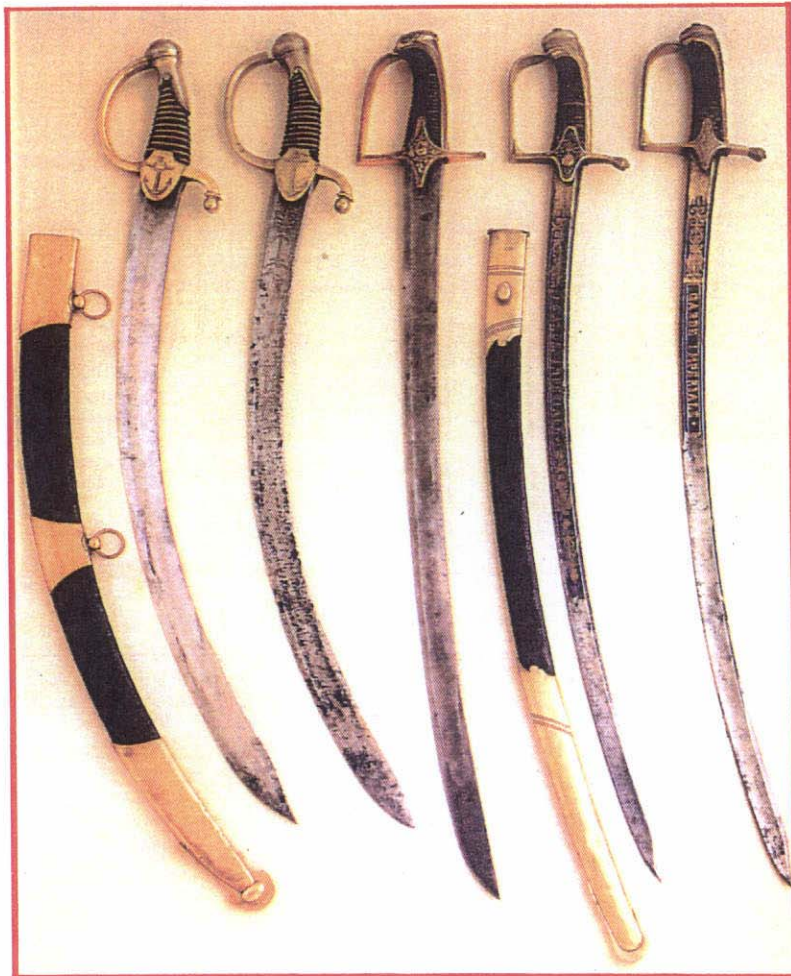


**L'Armée Française**

*An illustrated guide to the French swords and sabres*



*Drawings by Michel Pétard  
(Armes blanches militaires Françaises)*

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THIRD ISSUE  
NEW YORK, 1998

AN ILLUSTRATED GUIDE TO THE FRENCH SWORDS AND SABRES

EXTRACTS FROM THE  
ARMES BLANCHES MILITAIRES FRANÇAISES

DRAWINGS EXECUTED BY MICHEL PÉTARD UPON PHOTOGRAPHS OF  
CHRISTIAN ARIES

(LIBRAIRE PIERRE PETITOT, EDITION 1966-1979)

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EMAN M. VOVSI  
NEW YORK, 1998.

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## Introduction to swords and sabres

They were classified in two distinct types, depending upon the manner in which they were employed. Those designed for the cut – the swinging slash with the edge of the blade – were usually curved with a sharpened edge, or straight and wide-bladed with blunt point. Those designed for the thrust – in which the sabre stabbed forwards with the straight arm, like and extended finger – were narrow bladed with sharpened point and often blunt edge. Some sabres combined the characteristics of both types.

French sabres, despite a number of minor alterations in pattern, retained the same basic design: thrusting-swords with long, narrow blades and multi-barred hilts, and light cavalry sabres, designed for the cut but with a sharpened point capable of thrusting, initially with single bar guard but later adopting the better protection of multi-bar. Some, particularly those of carabiniers, had shell-guards bearing plaques embossed with regimental devices, in this case the bursting grenade. As with firearms, sabre-patterns were named after the year in the Revolutionary calendar in which they were authorized, *not* the year of actual issue; for example, the An IX (1800-1801) heavy cavalry sabre was not issued until 1803-1805, apparently; whilst the An IX and An XI (1802-1803) light cavalry patterns were not issued until about 1807, old patterns continuing in use even after a newer pattern had been distributed to some units. Two further patterns – the An XIII for dragoons and light cavalry – were issued even later.

In general, types of sabres used by Napoleon's Light cavalry are divided into four major groups:

- 1) *Sabre à la Hongroise* – it was derived from the Hungarian sabres that were adopted by many European armies in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. It usually had a wooden scabbard covered with leather and cooper or brass. It had hilt with one branch and an extension on both sides (*langets*) that were designed to put the saber and scabbard into a correct position when the saber was inserted.
- 2) *Sabre de cavalerie légère* – while this name actually stands for light cavalry, it is used only for sabres that have metal scabbards with a three branches brass hilt, the most famous models being the An IX and An XIII. This group of sabres was usually less luxurious and therefore mostly used by the enlisted troopers of the light cavalry regiments.
- 3) *Sabre de garde perlée* – the pearl-like “buttons” on its hilt can identify this type of sabre. Scabbards were usually made out of wood partially covered by cooper and sometimes leather, too. This type of arm was already in use amongst the officers of the *Ancien Régime*.
- 4) *Sabre à la Allemande* – can be identified by its straight hilt guard and square hilt pommel (*pommeau*, the button on top of the guard). It usually had a blade *à la Montmorency*, that is a blade with double “blood groove”, often with engravings in gold. This type of saber was very popular amongst superior officers and was therefore usually very luxuriously crafted. Scabbards were sometimes covered with sheet silver or gold and adorned with the most beautiful engravings.

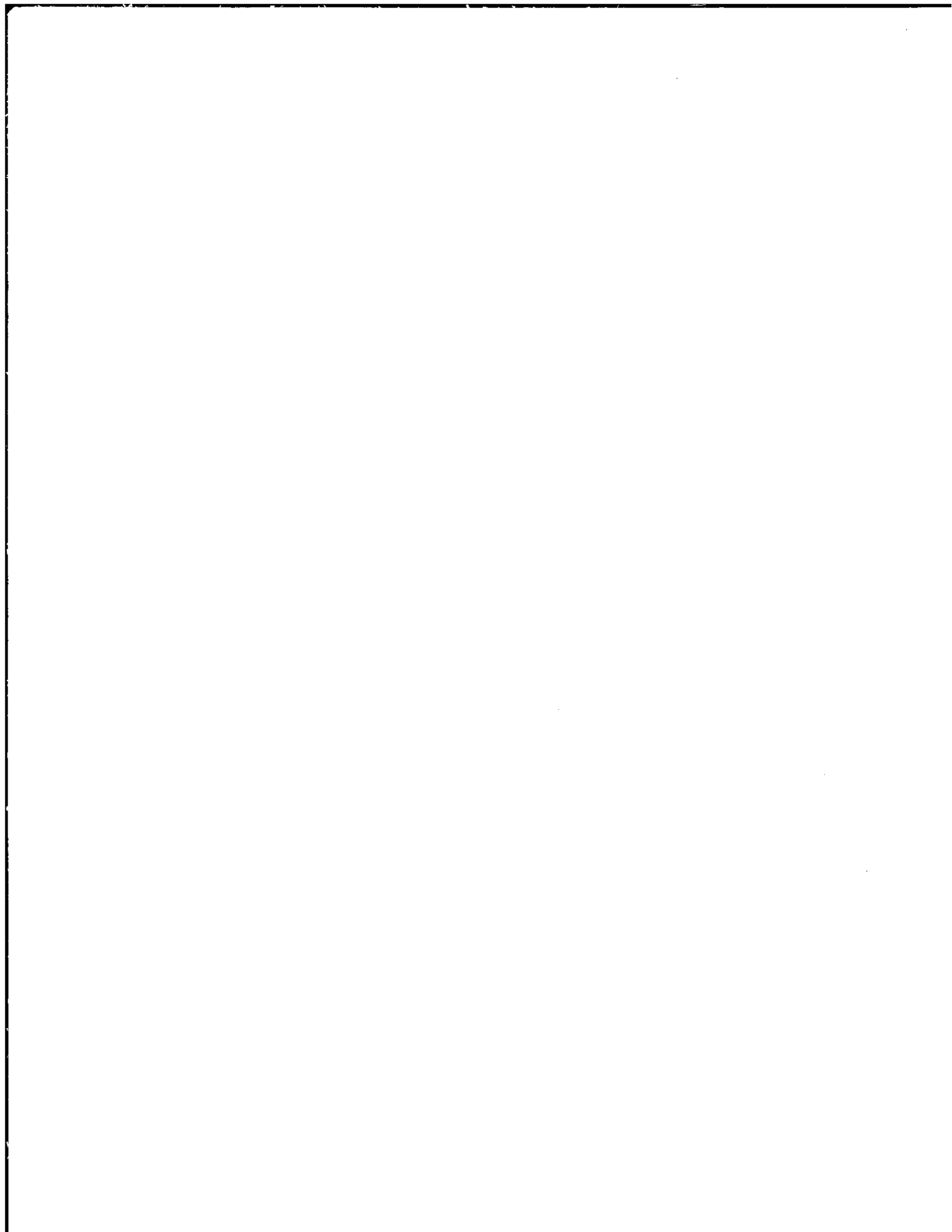
The Heavy cavalry sabres had a straight blade with a shell shaped guard. Thus, for example, carabiniers were equipped with lighter type of a sword modified from An IX to An XI. In 1807, it has flat blade with brass guard with one main cross piece and wide brass hilt, linked to the cross piece by three minor branches; on the side of the counter-guard, a small plate to protect the thumb. Handle was that of the Line cavalry, with brass filigree in the imitation hide. Grenadiers à Cheval of the Guard were using An XI sword pattern; this type had a curved blade, the guard in brass with a grenade, brass sheath. Towards 1807 two reinforcement bracelets were added. This pattern was used until 1810 when a new one was issued, with two smaller grooves instead of a single large one.

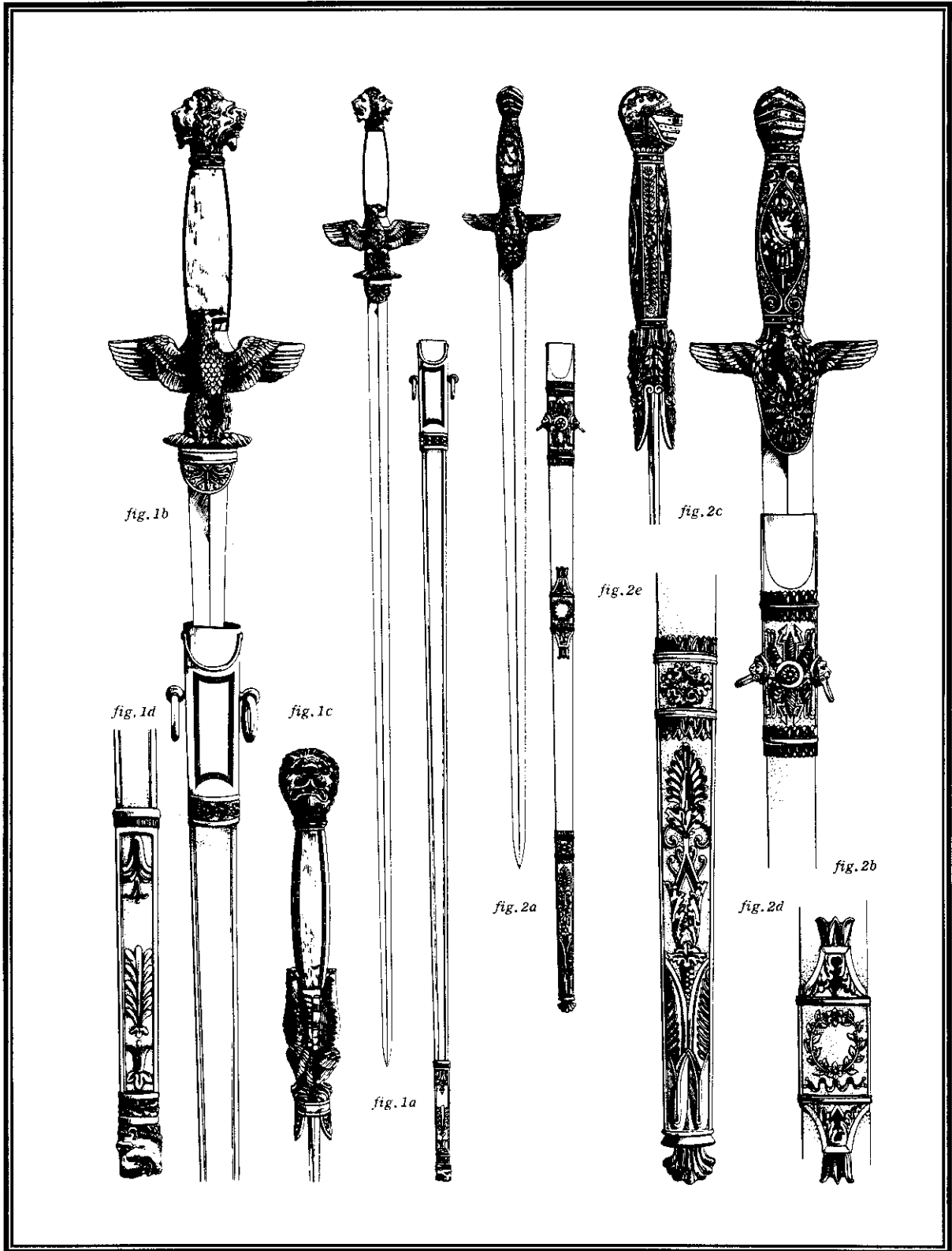
French infantry officers carried straight-bladed épées and curved sabres for the élite companies, often varied in pattern with unofficial types carried at the owner's whim. Many officer sabres were influenced by Greek mythology which was the "fashion" during the late Directory – Consulate period. Medusa and other Greek gods and the sun were popular designees on sabres of this period. Officer sabres had engravings on the scabbard as well as on the blade much of the time. Blades were engraved for 1/3 of their length along the upper part. The engraved part was blued and the engravings were accentuated with gold, melted in the engravings.

Note that some officers brought Mameluck sabres back with them after Napoleon's Egyptian campaign (1789-1801) – a sharply-curved weapon with guardless hilt. Highly fashionable, particularly amongst Light cavalry officers, the pattern was carried unofficially, becoming so popular that Europeans copies were produced. For example, General Lasalle brought 3 blades back made of damask steel and commissioned a French armorer fit them with a guard and scabbard in Oriental style. One of Lasalle's sabres is in the collection of the Musée de l'Armée in Paris and can be seen on many of the pictures made of this famous cavalry general. General Claparède also carried a sabre of the "Egyptian style".

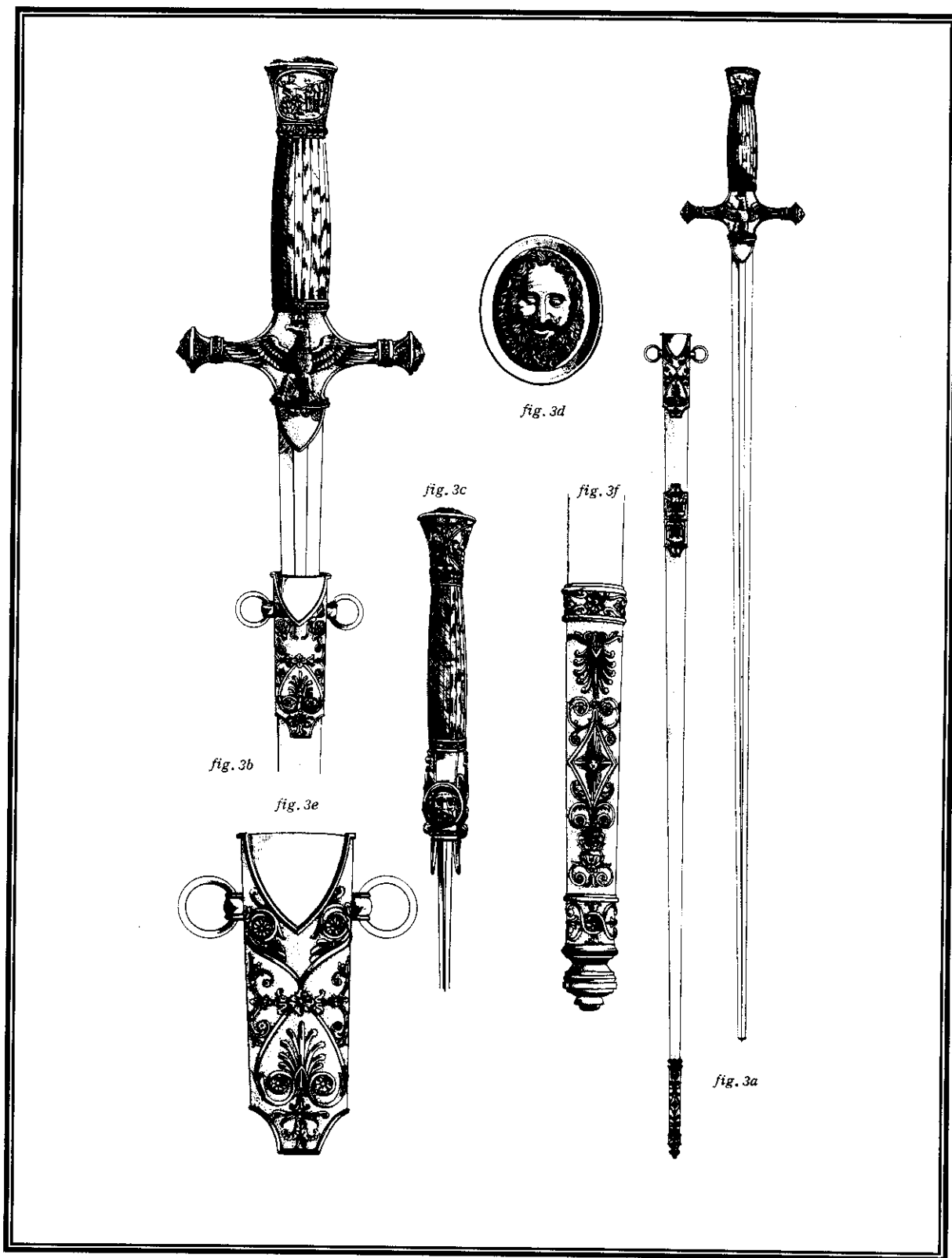
The general officer's sabre during Consulate could have its guard and scabbard made out of a cooper alloy and is engraved with depictions of flowers, the sun and other ornaments. For that period, on the top part of the blade there was a variety of flower and "trophy of arms" engravings. The wooden grip on the sabre's guard was made out of ebony; the pommel was like a melon, shaped as was very common on officer's sabres of that time. The scabbard had two rings and a trailing edge (*boutrolle*) made of the same material.

The pattern of general officer's sabre under Empire was subject to the Regulation of 1<sup>st</sup> Vendémiaire, An XII (24 September 1803). In general, its mountings of bronze-gilt were made up of a single knuckle-bow forming a cross-piece and rejoined to the pommel by a palm-leaf molding, framed and pierced right through. The quillon ended in a lion's head. A rectangular shoulder bore a trophy and, below, two half langets in shield form bore a Medusa's head. The hilt often was of ebony cut into scales. The pommel with a square socket and oval cap bore on its base two or three stars according to rank. The sunken cap-piece was stamped with lion's head. The scabbard was of browned steel with three fittings: a chape decorated with a cock, a band on the lower part stamped with the Nemean lion, a second band decorated with two crowns; the long toe ended squarely and was augmented by a bronze piece forming a spike.



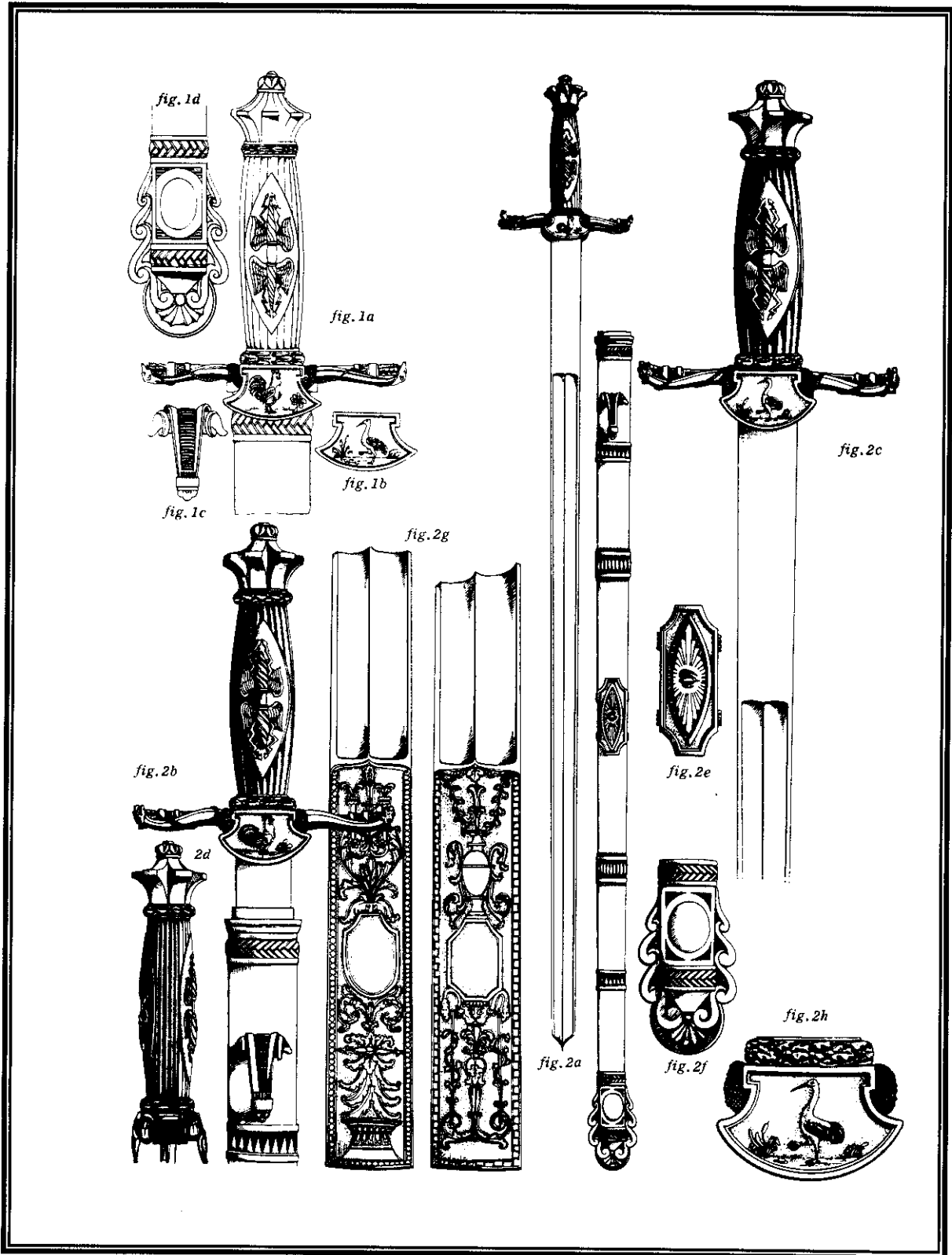


Swords (*glives*) of the marshals Bessières (Figure 1) and Macdonald (Figure 2)  
(Musée de l'armée).



Sword (*glaiive*) of the marshal Joachim Murat  
(Musée de l'armée).

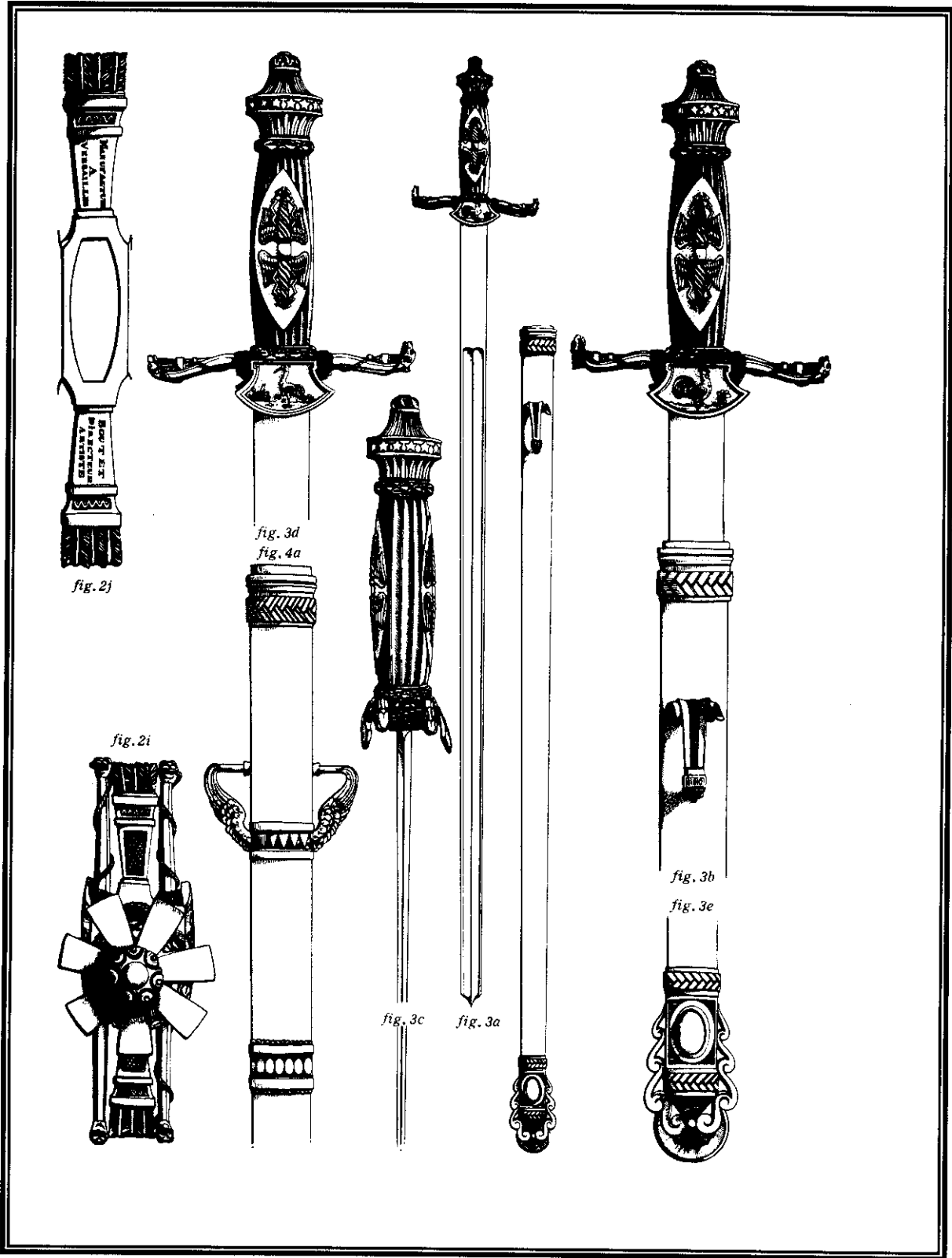




Swords (*glives*) of the Commanders in Chief, by regalement of 1<sup>ère</sup> Vendémiaire AN XII.

Figure 1. As designed by regalement

Figure 2. Model executed by Boutet (Musée de l'armée).



Swords (*glives*) of the Commanders in Chief, by regalement of 1<sup>ère</sup> Vendémiaire AN XII.  
Figures 3-4. Variations of hilt and scabbard.

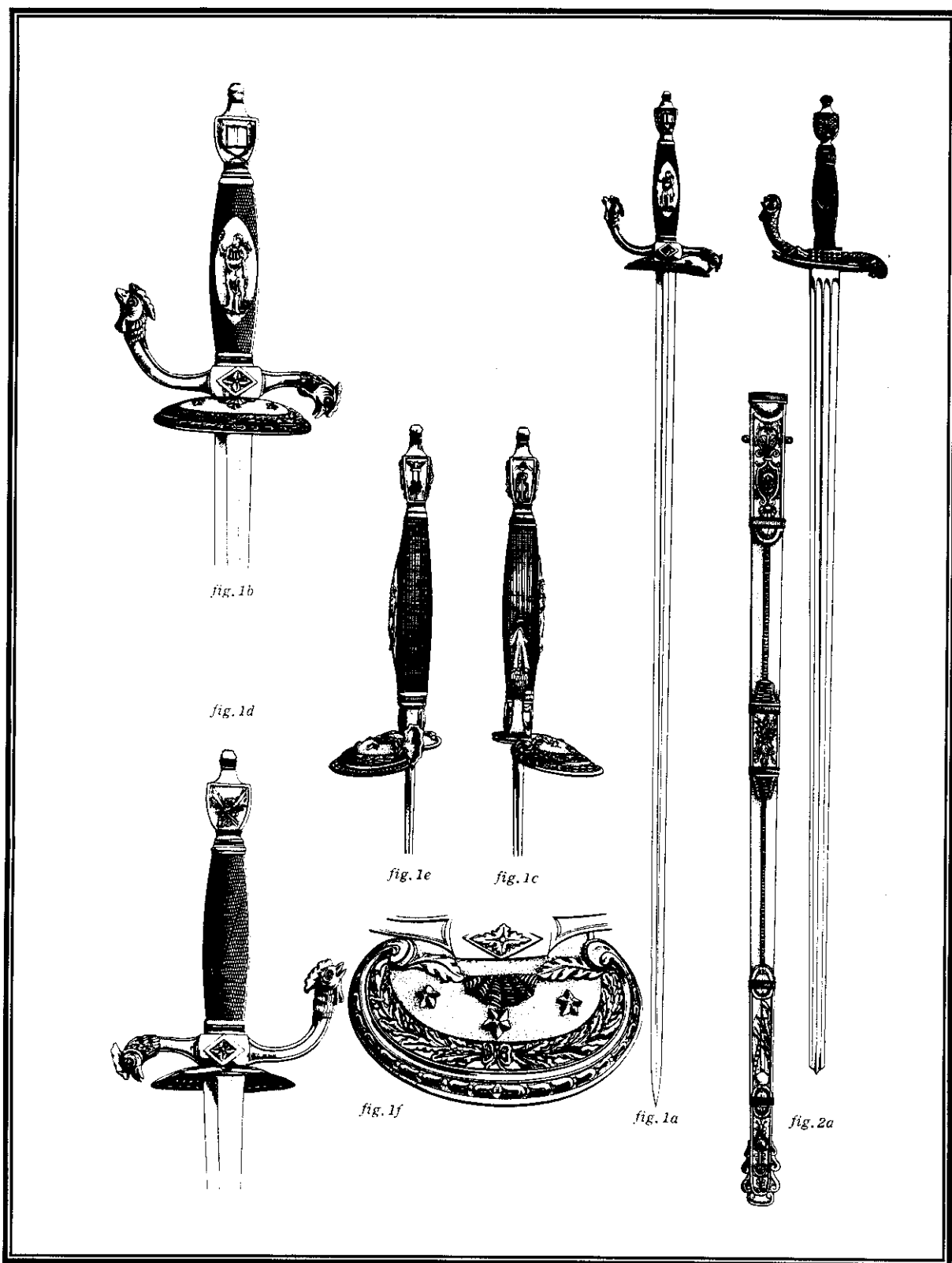
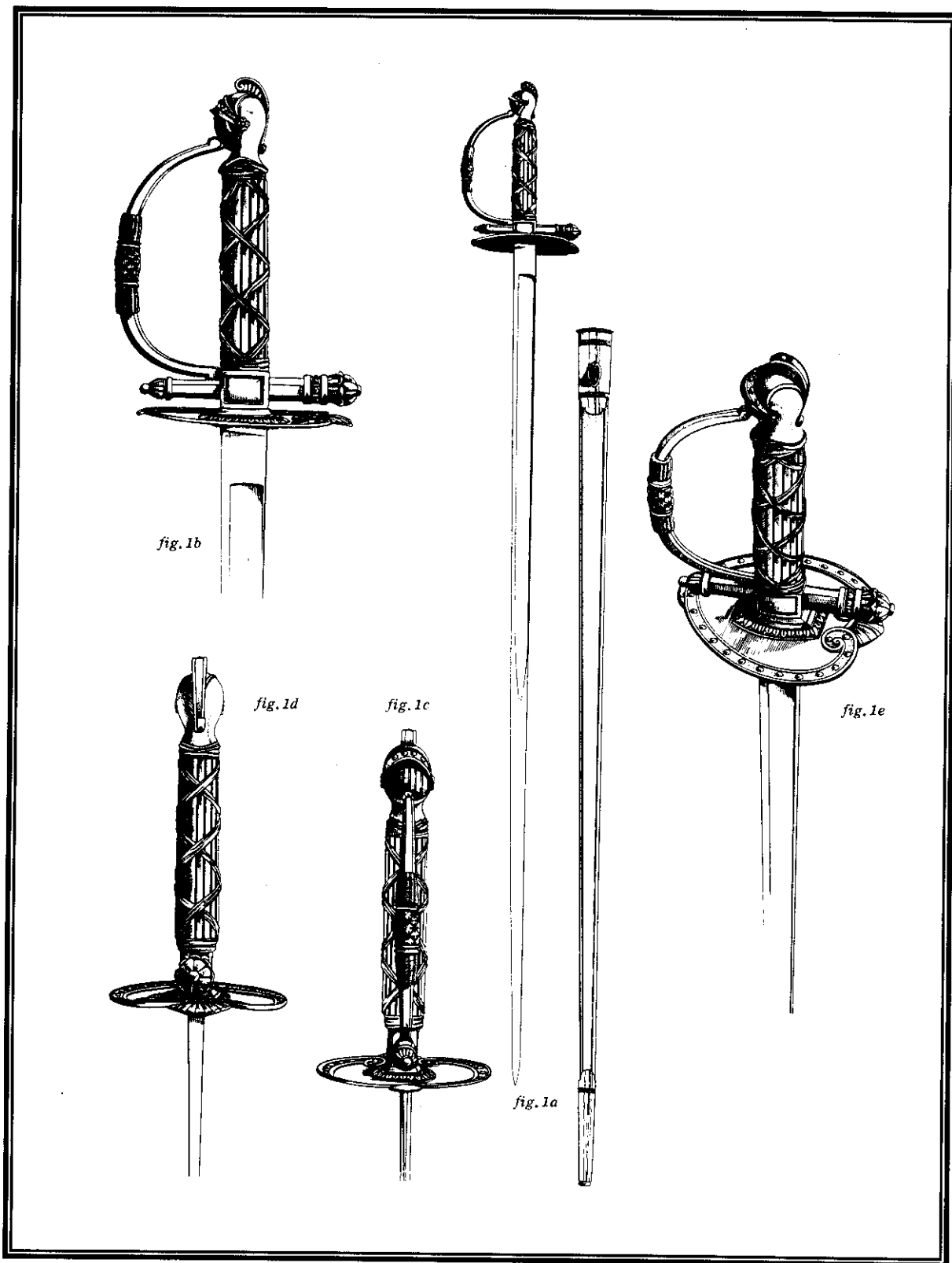
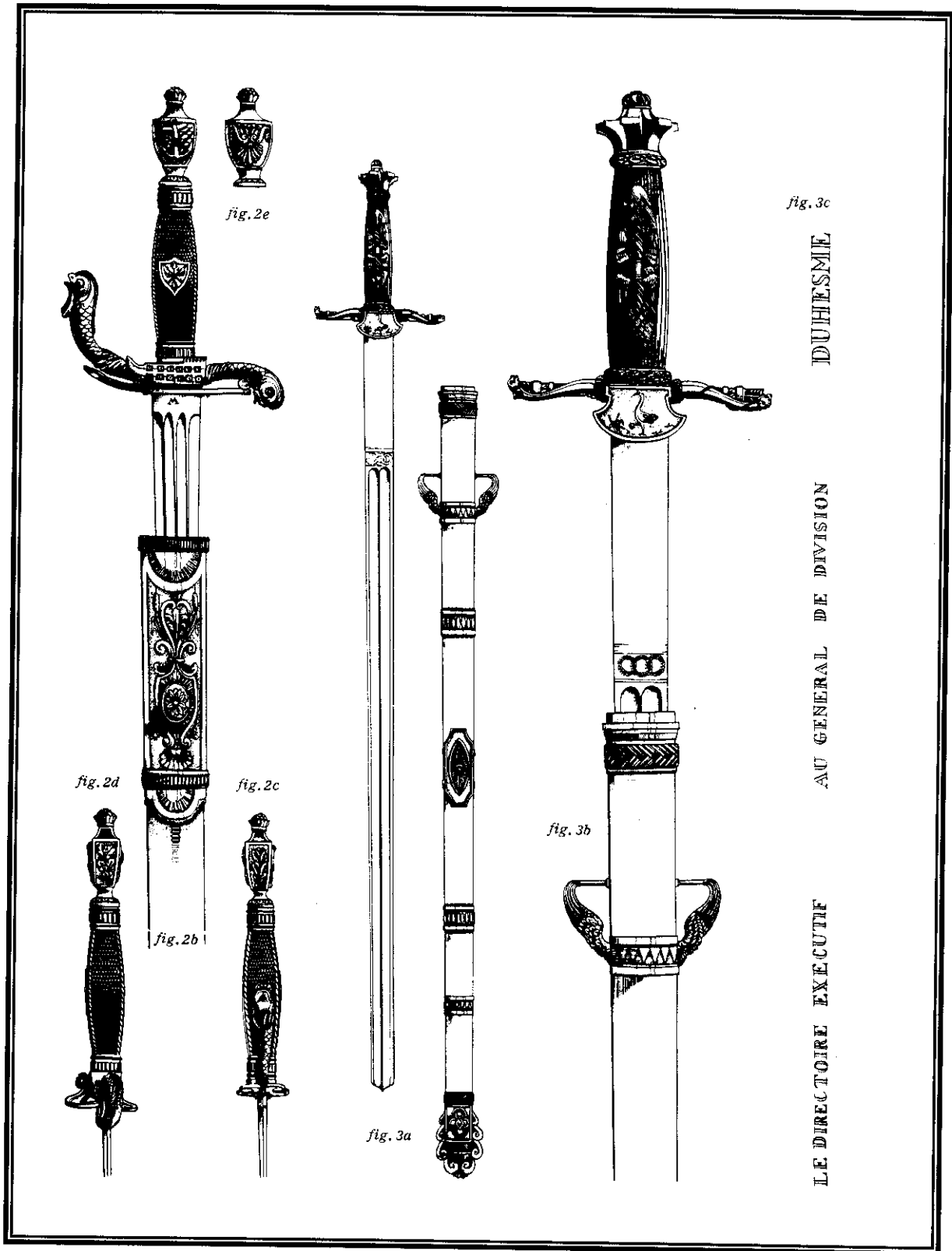


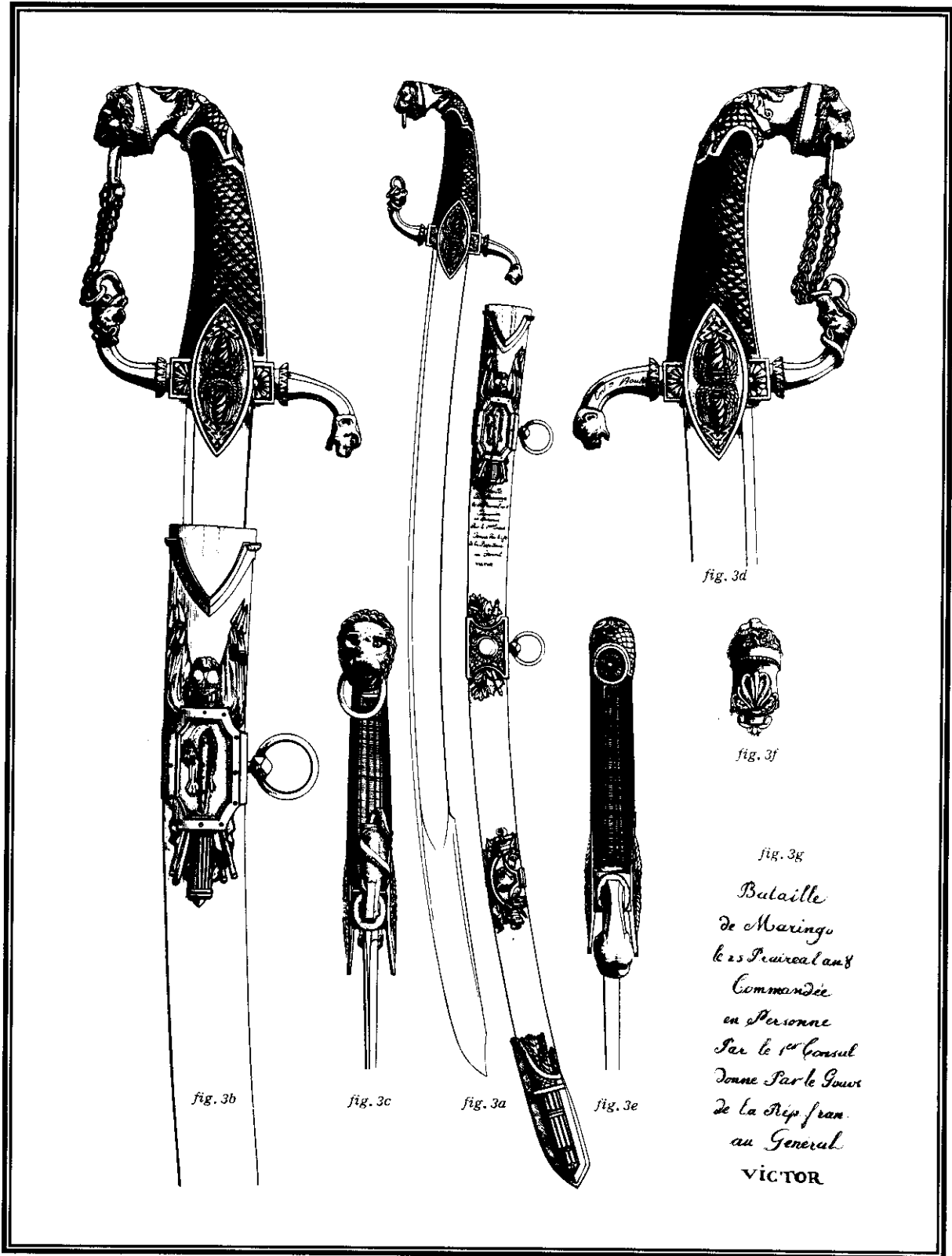
Figure 1. Sword (*glaiives*) of the general officer, by decree 10 Pluviôse AN IV (Musée de l'armée).  
Figure 2. Attribute of admiral, by same decree, epoch of the Revolution.



Épée of the general officer, by regalement of AN VI (Coll. Glain).



Swords (*glives*) of the admiral (Figure 2) and General of division Duhesme 1766-1815 (Figure 3), by decree of 20 Thermidor AN VI (Musée de l'armée).



Sabre presented by the First Consul to General Victor to commemorate the battle of Marengo (Musée de l'armée).

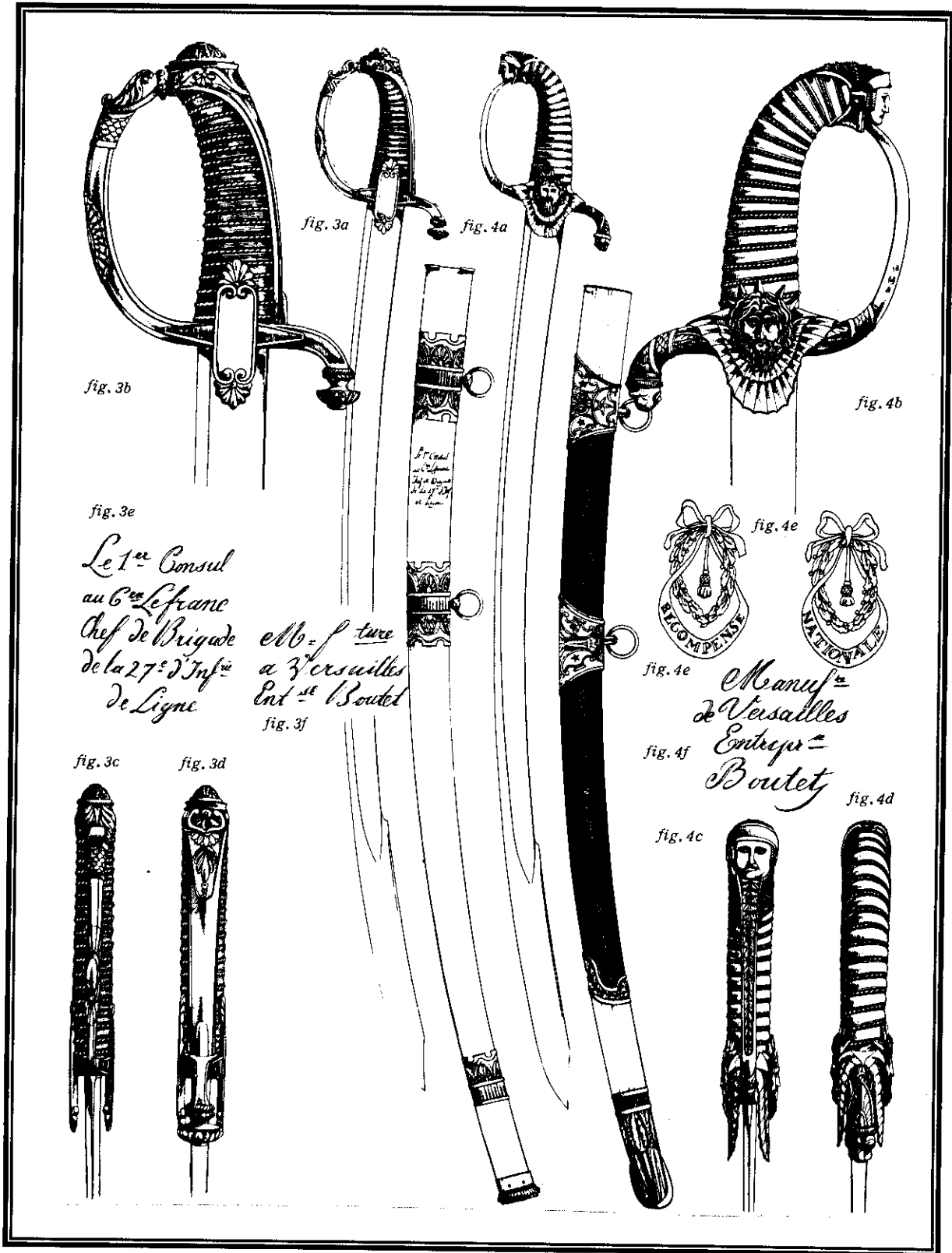
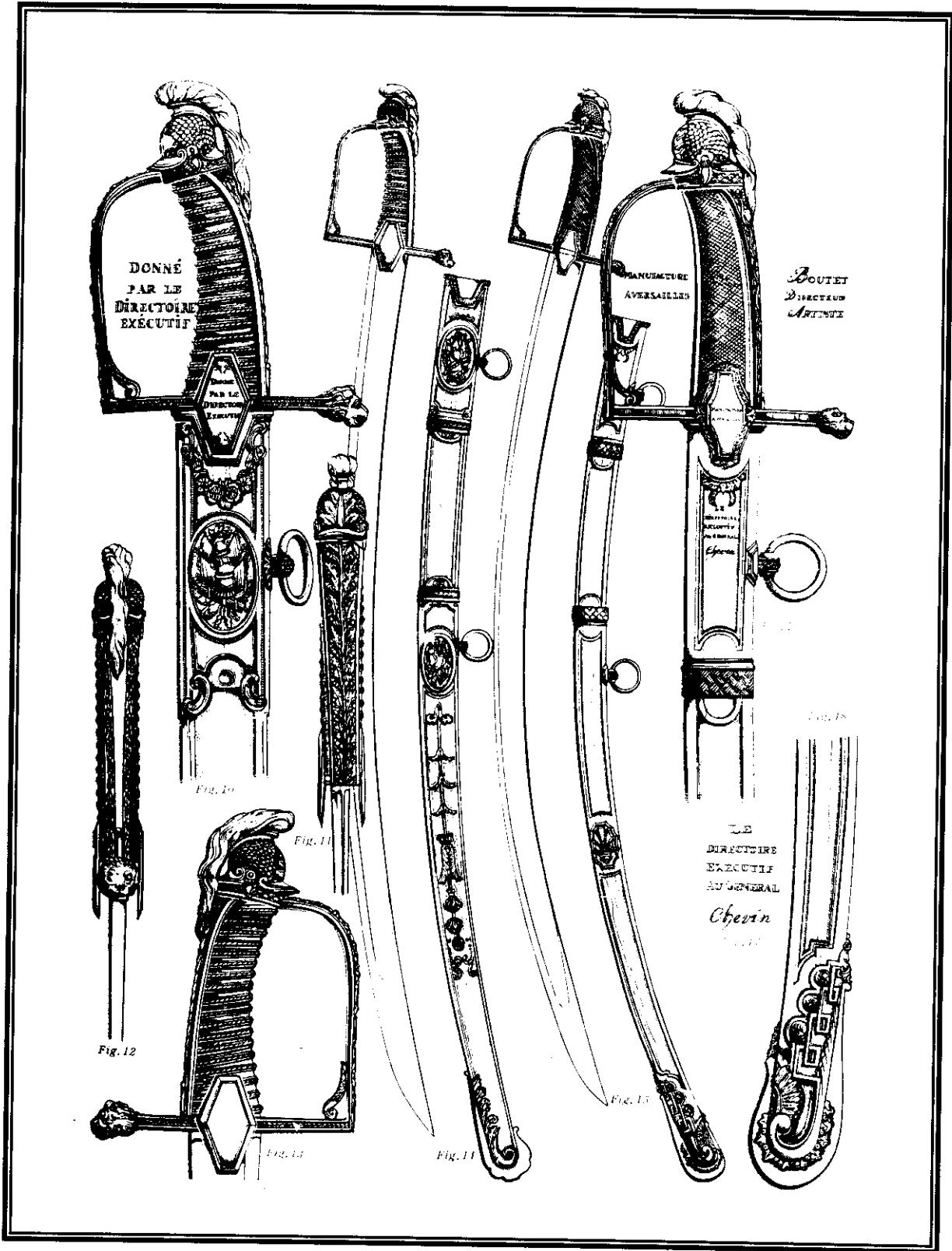


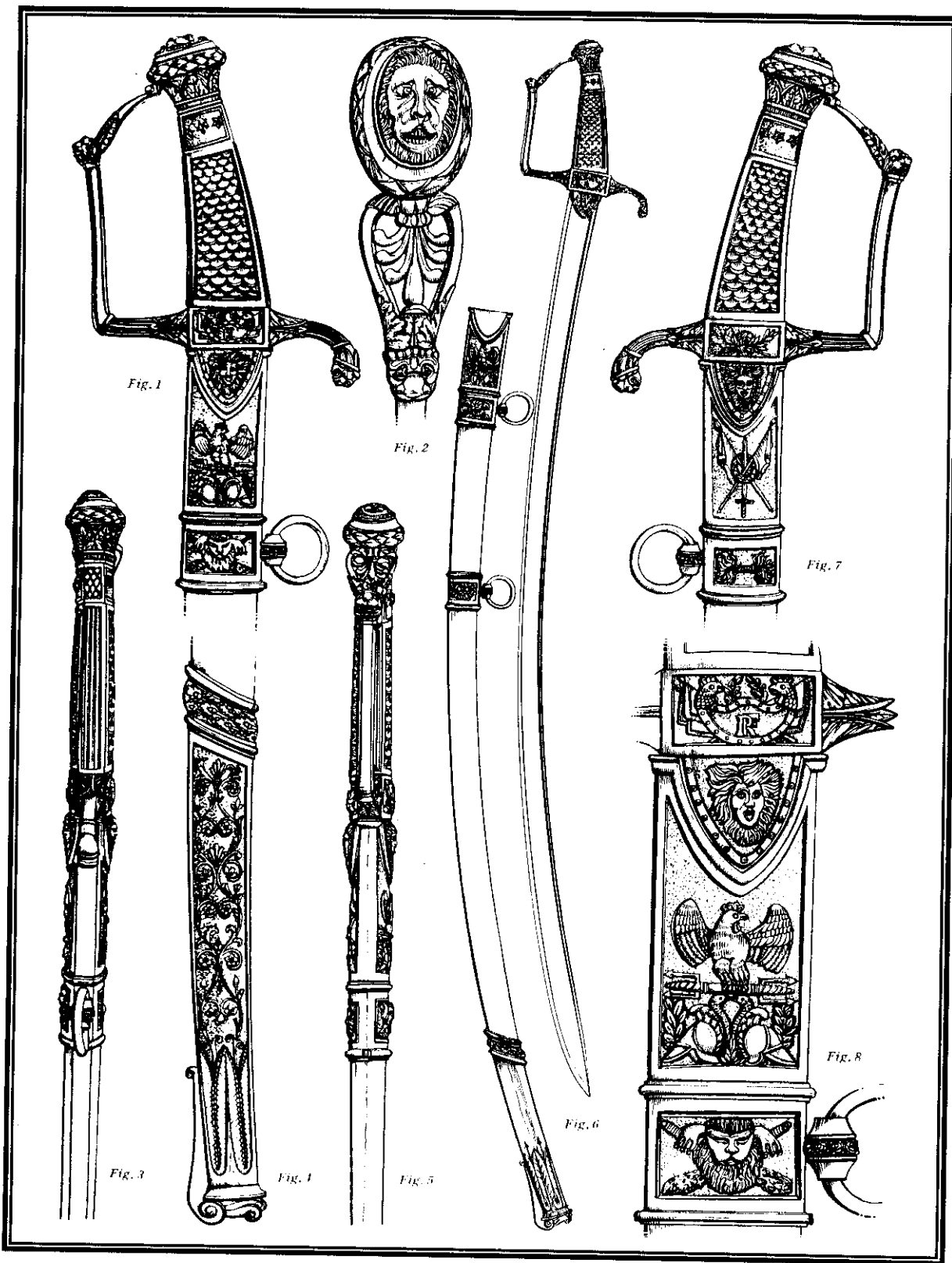
Figure 3. Sabre of Honour presented by the First Consul to Jacques Lefranc, chef de brigade of the 27<sup>th</sup> Line demi-brigade, on 6 March 1801 (Musée de l'armée).

Figure 4. Sabre of admiral (Coll. Dr. Hutin).



Figures 10-14. Sabre of the general officer (No. J.596, Musée de l'armée).  
Figures 15-18. Sabre of the general officer preserved at Musée Corrain, Nancy.





Figures 1-8. Sabre of the general officer by Regalement of 1<sup>er</sup> Vendémiaire An XII, or 24 September 1803 (No. 4852, Musée de l'armée).

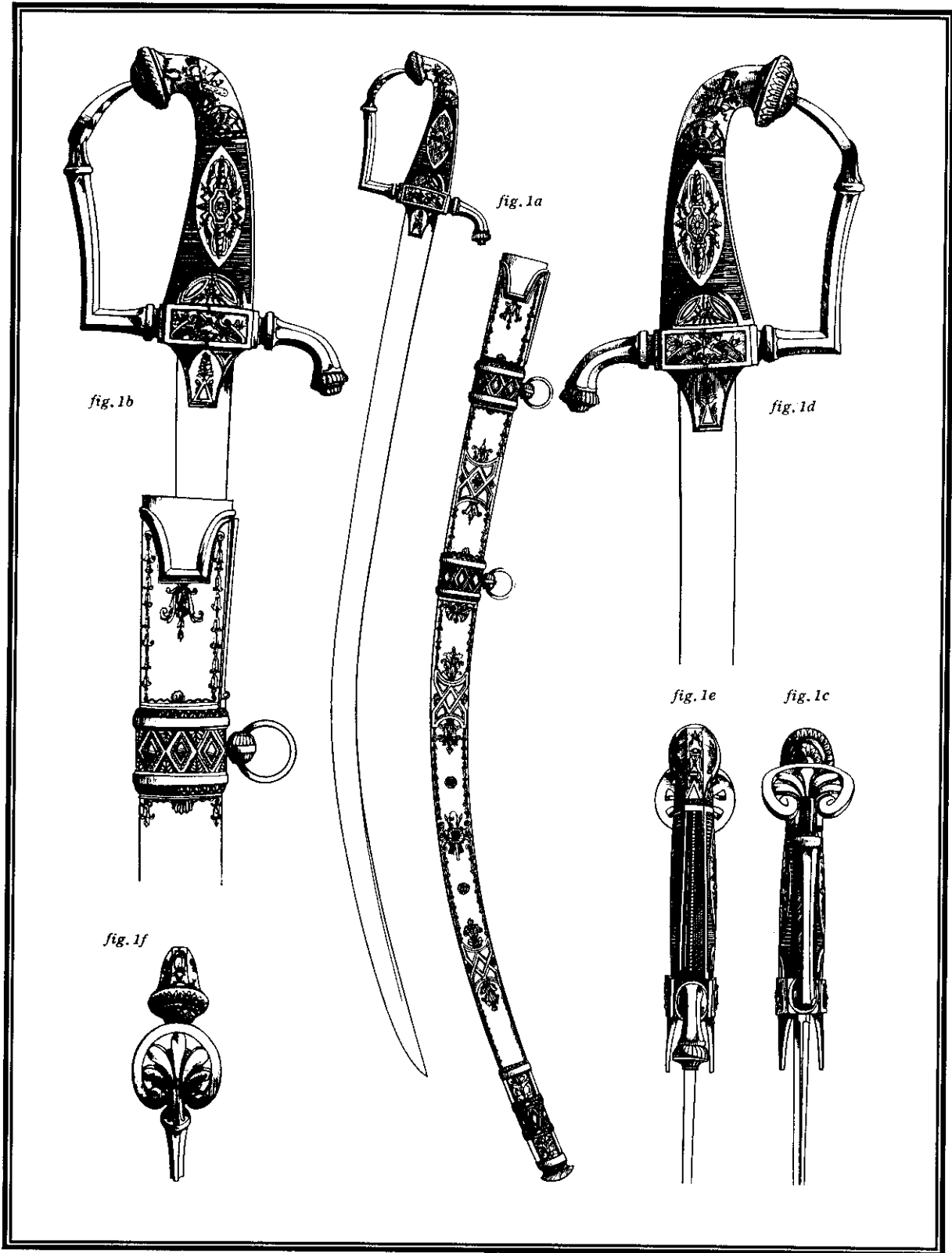


Figure 1. Sabre of the General Jean-L.-F. Le Marois, (1776-1783).  
(Musée de l'armée).

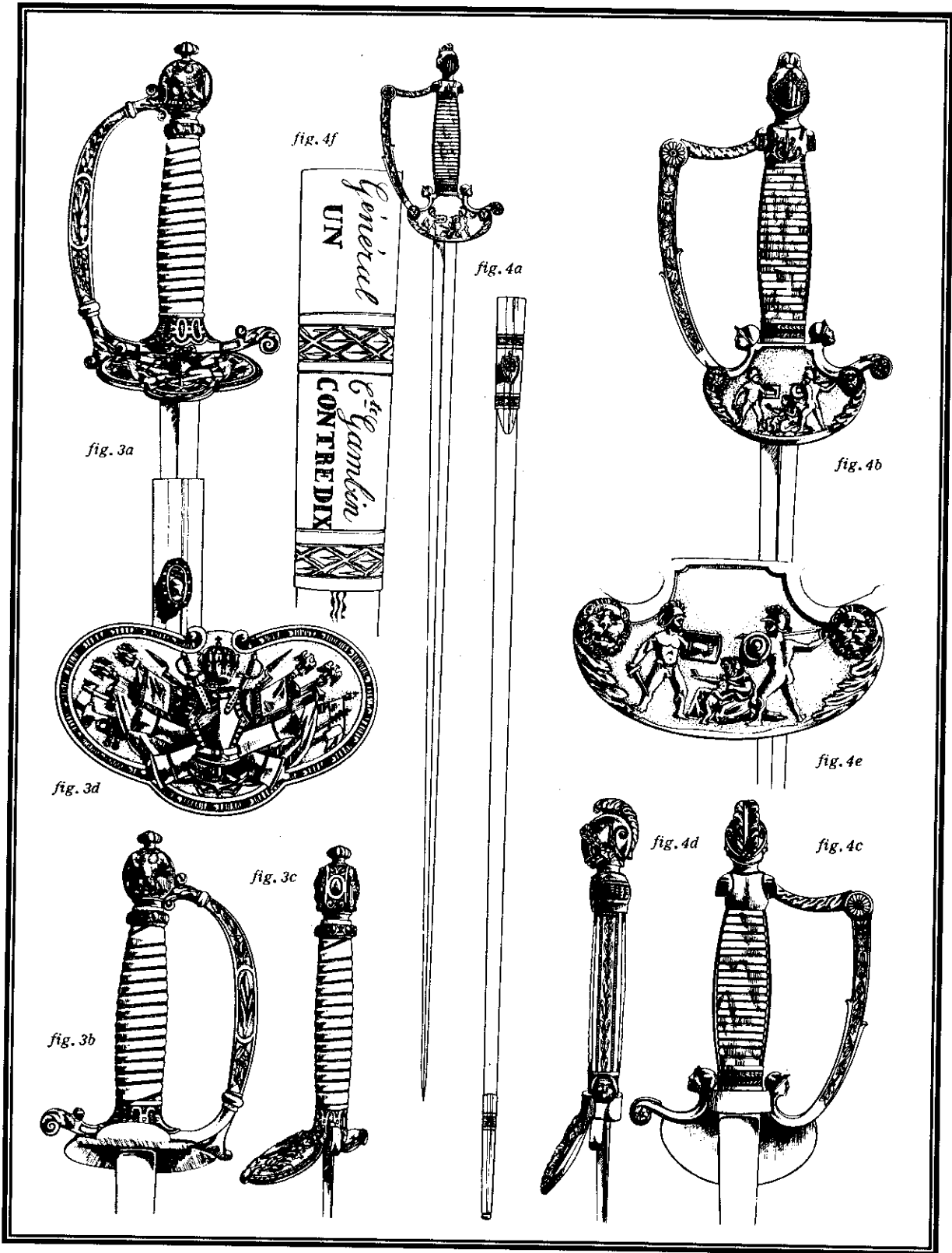
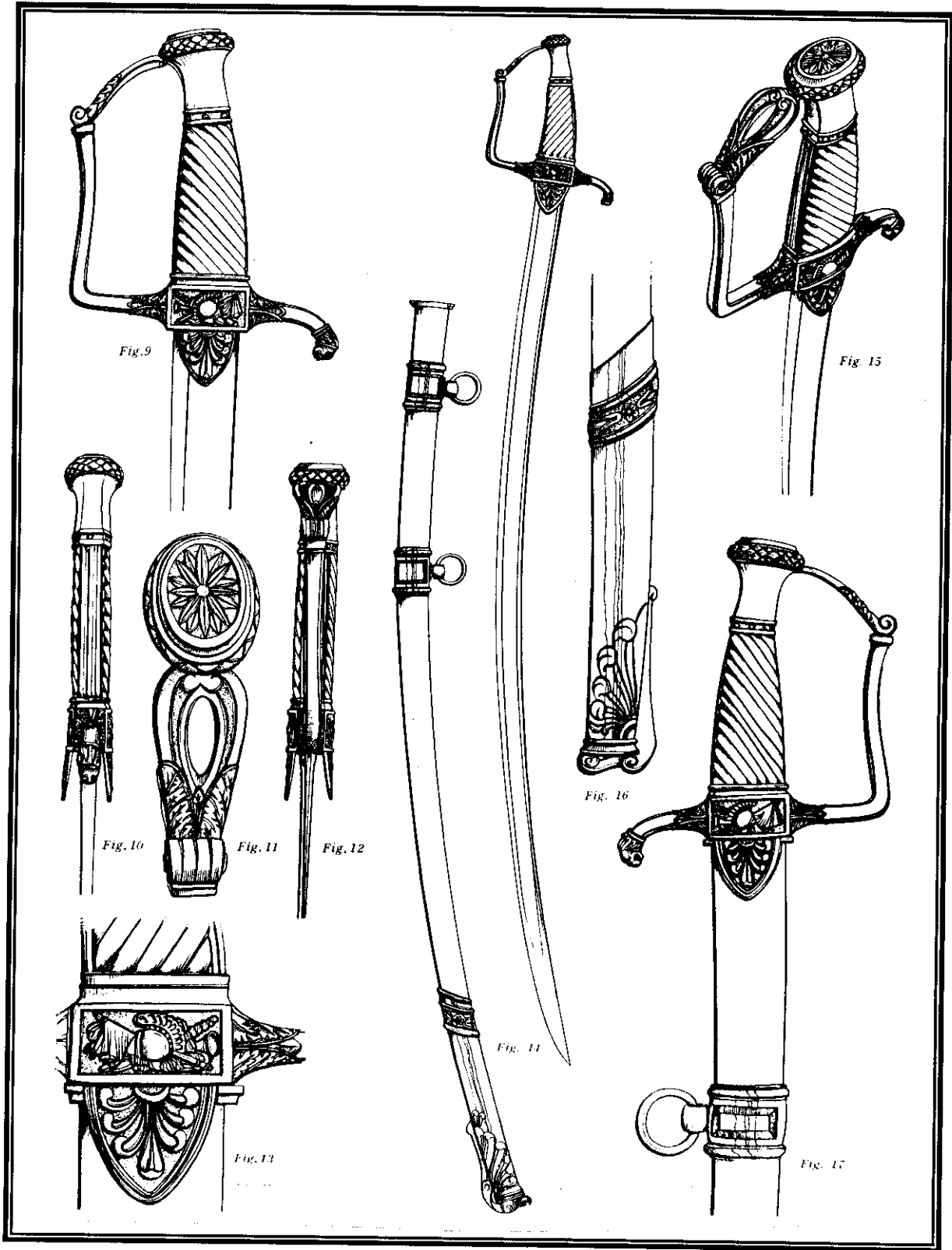
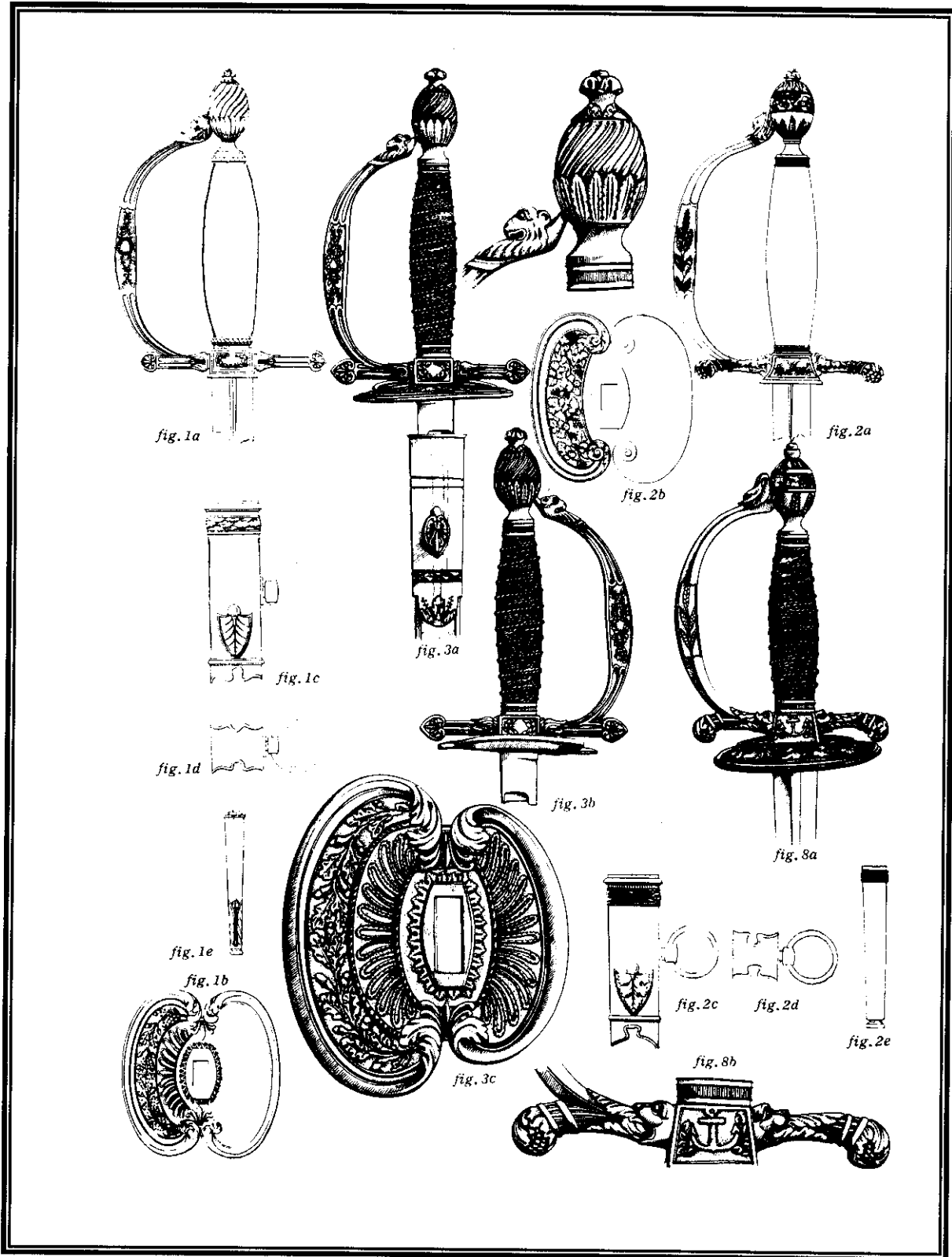


Figure 3. Épée of colonel of the 84<sup>th</sup> Line Regiment Jean-H. Gambin, carried at the battle of Gratz, Austria, on 25-26 June 1809 (Coll. Raoul & Jean Brunon).

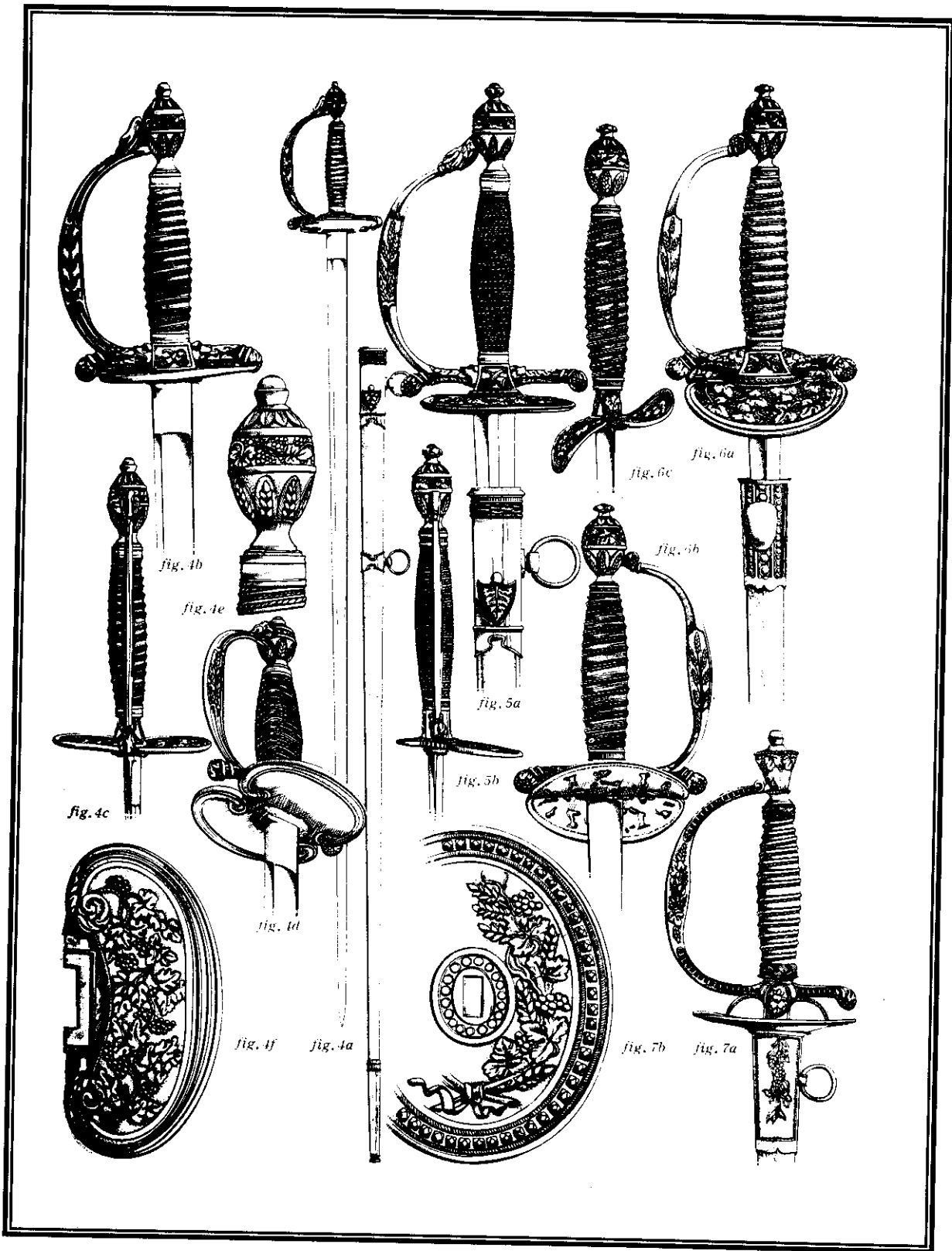
Figure 4. Épée presented to General of brigade Gambin, promoted 5 March 1811. (Musée de l'armée)



Figures 9-17. Sabre of the General Staff officer (Coll. Pinault, Nantes).



Commissaires des guerres & Inspecteurs aux revues, by regalement of Vendémiaire AN XII  
Figures 1-2. By regalement. Figure 3. Épée of Commissaire, 1810. Figure 8. Marine, 1810.



Commissaires des guerres & Inspecteurs aux revues, by regalement of Vendémiaire AN XII  
 Figure 4. Inspecteur, epoch Consulate. Figure 5. Inspecteur, epoch Empire (Musée de l'Empéri).  
 6. Épée on the end of the Empire. 7. Épée worn with ceremonial dress.

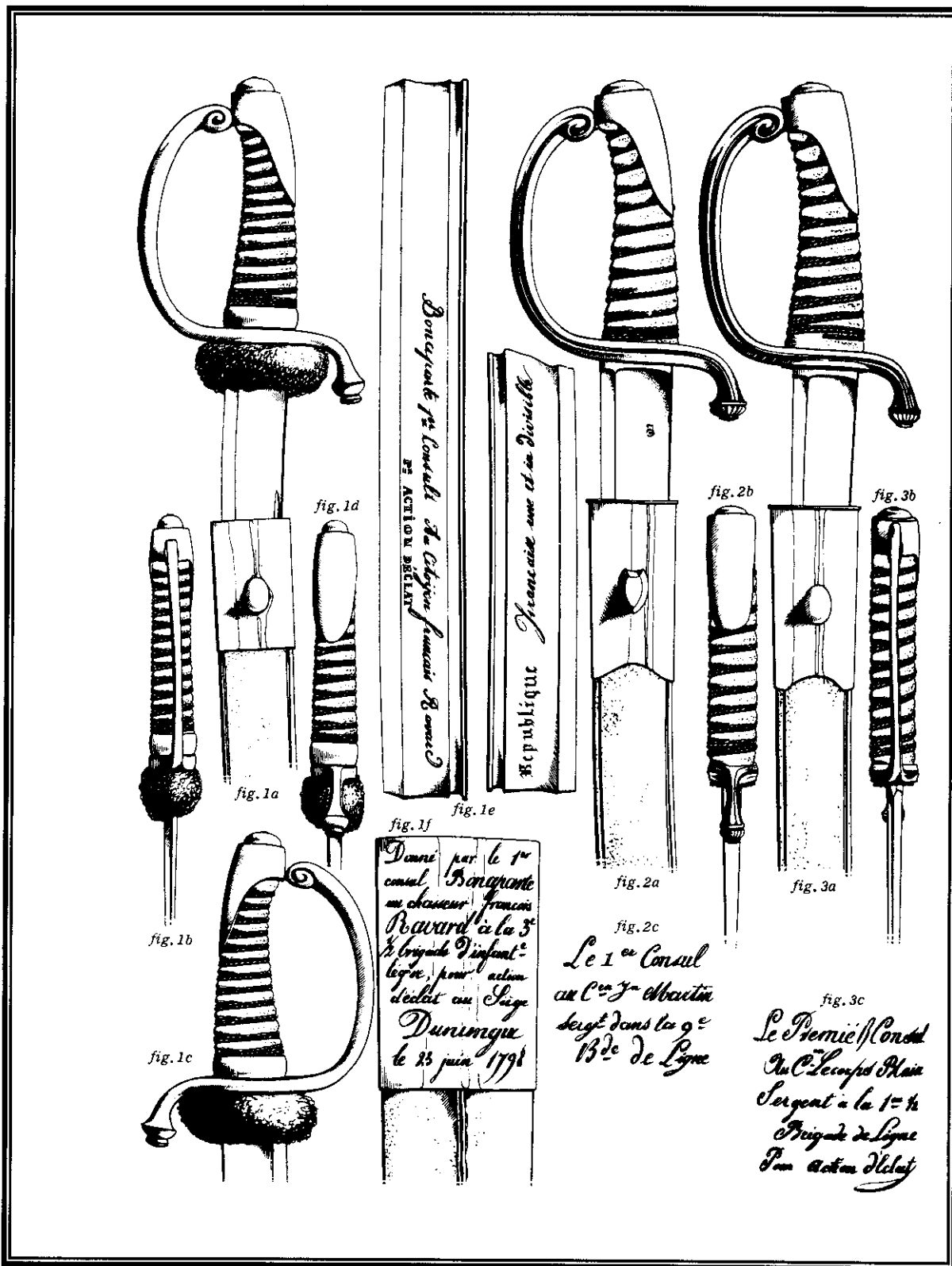
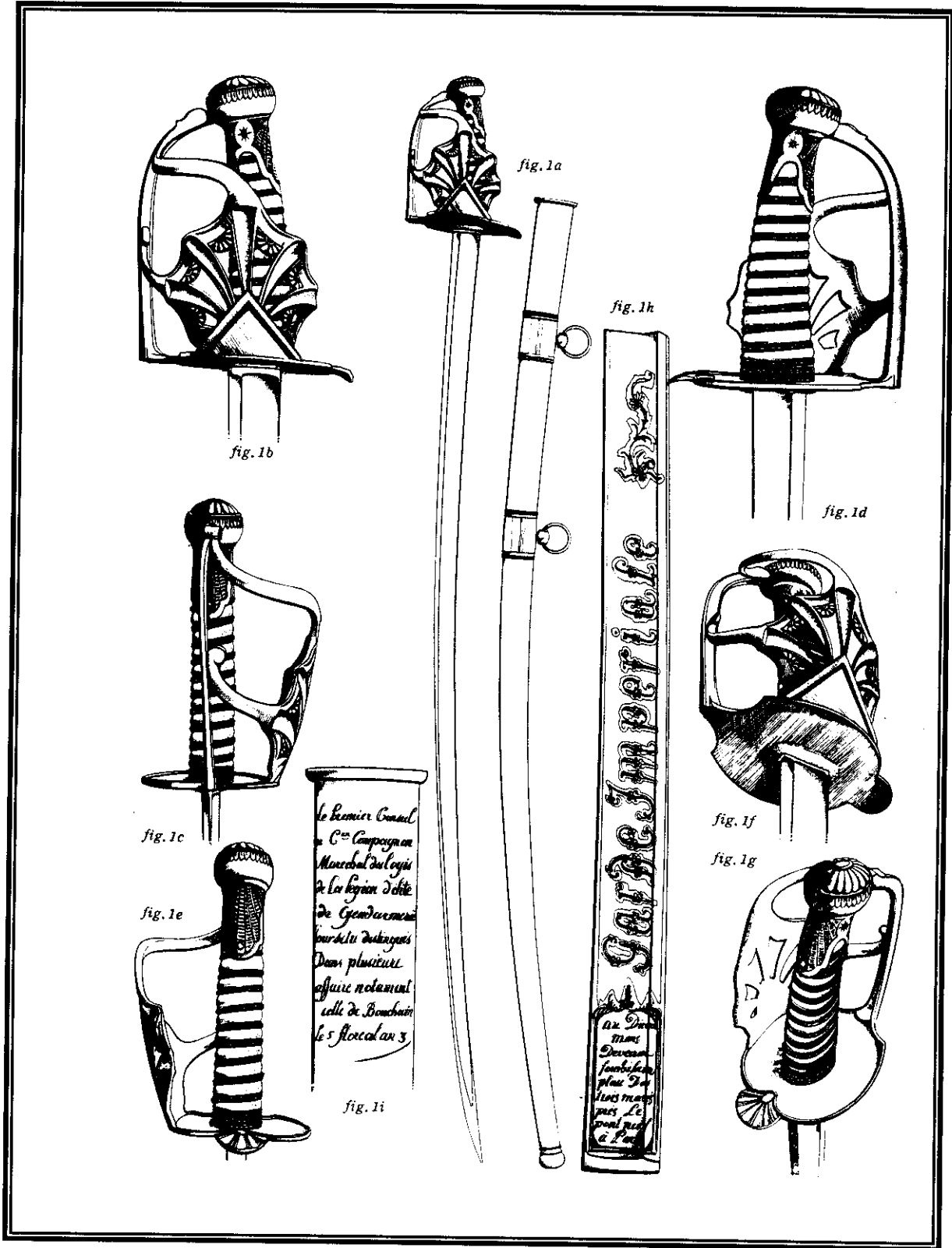


Figure 1, 3. Sabres of Honour, for trooper and NCO, January 1800-May 1802 (Musée de l'armée).  
 Figure 2. Sabre for sergeant, the 9<sup>th</sup> Line Demi-brigade (Musée de Lorraine, Nancy).



Sabres of Honour of the Line cavalry, 1800-1804 (Musée de l'armée).



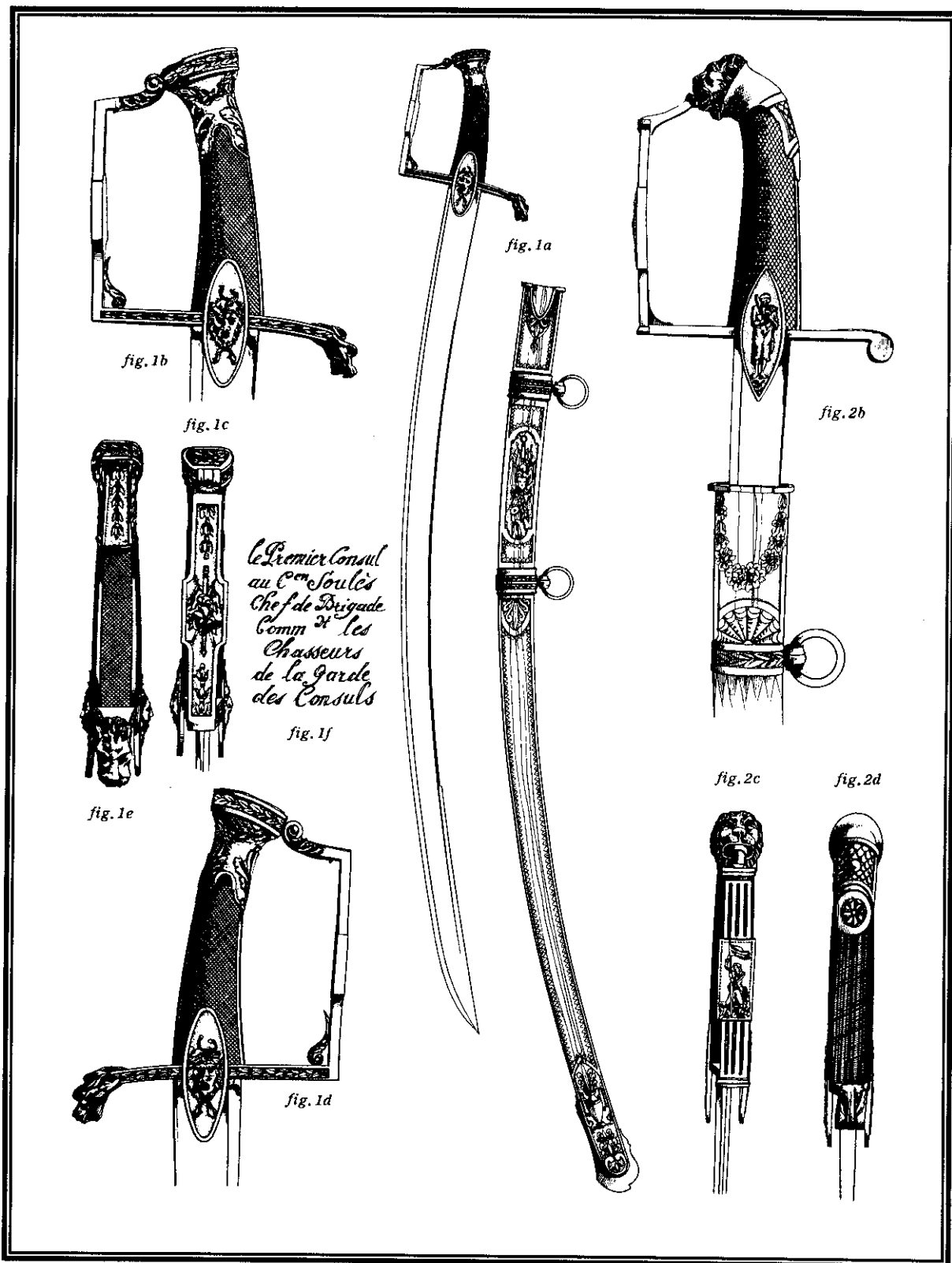
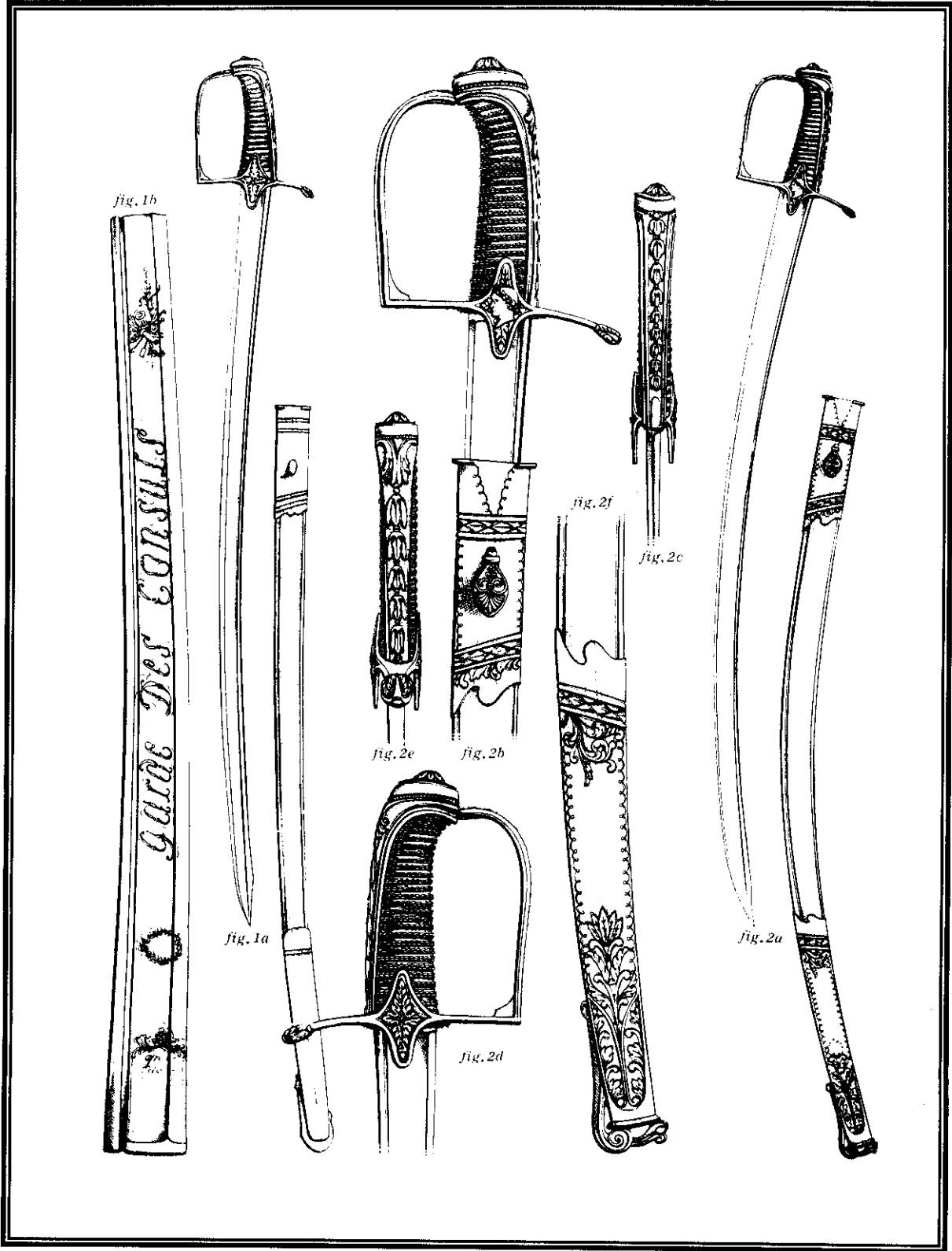
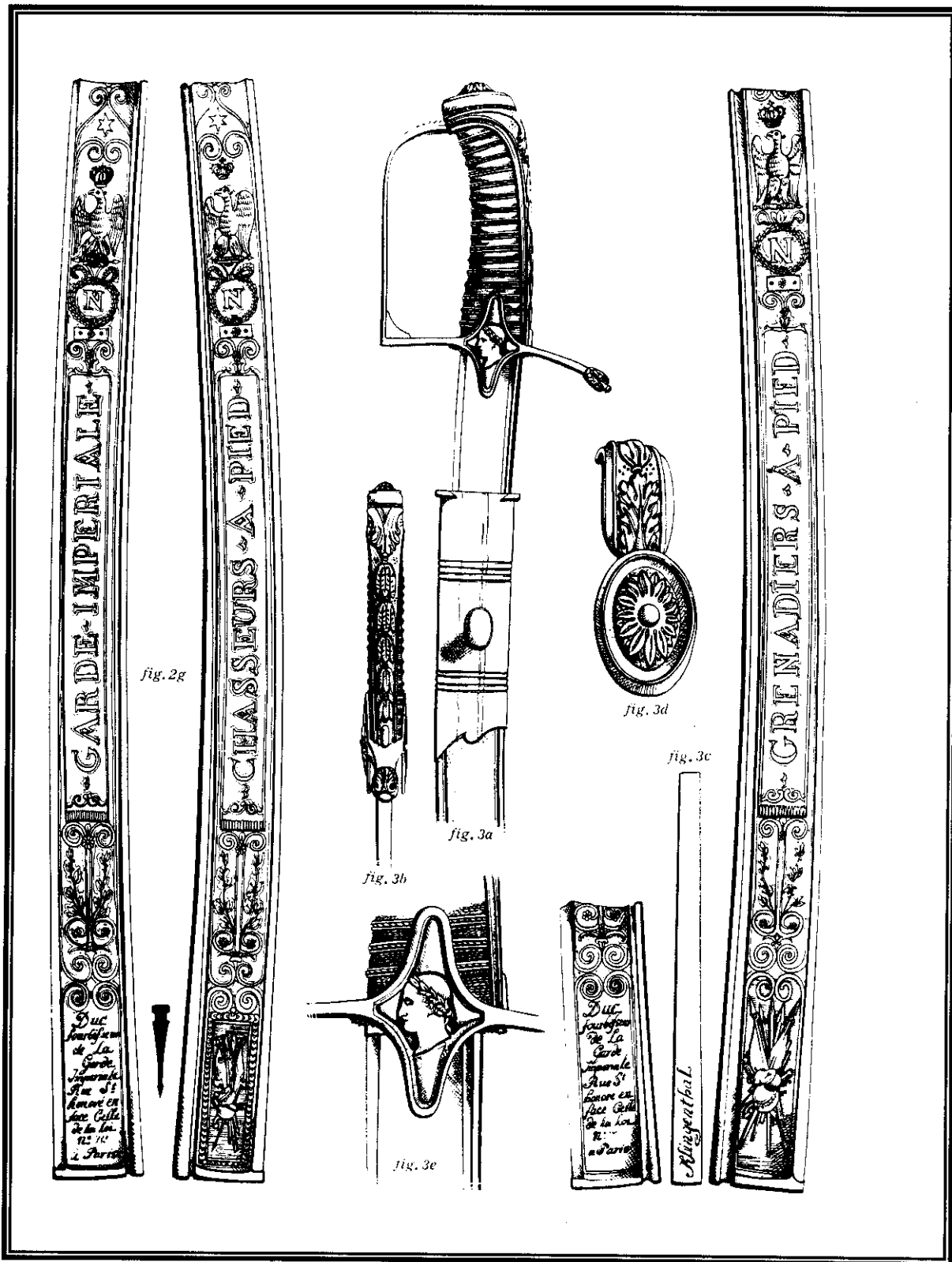


Figure 1. Sabre of Honour, presented by the First Consul to the chef de brigade de la Garde des Consuls J. Soulès, on 5 August 1801 (Musée de l'armée).

Figure 2. Officer's sabre of the St.-Luke, Chasseurs à Cheval (Coll. Raoul & Jean Brunon).



1. Sabre of the grenadier officer, la Garde des Consuls
2. Sabre of the officer of the Chasseurs à pied de la Garde Impériale (Coll. Dr. Hutin).



Figures 2-3. Sabres of the grenadier and chasseur officers, de la Garde Impériale (Coll. Dr. Hutin).

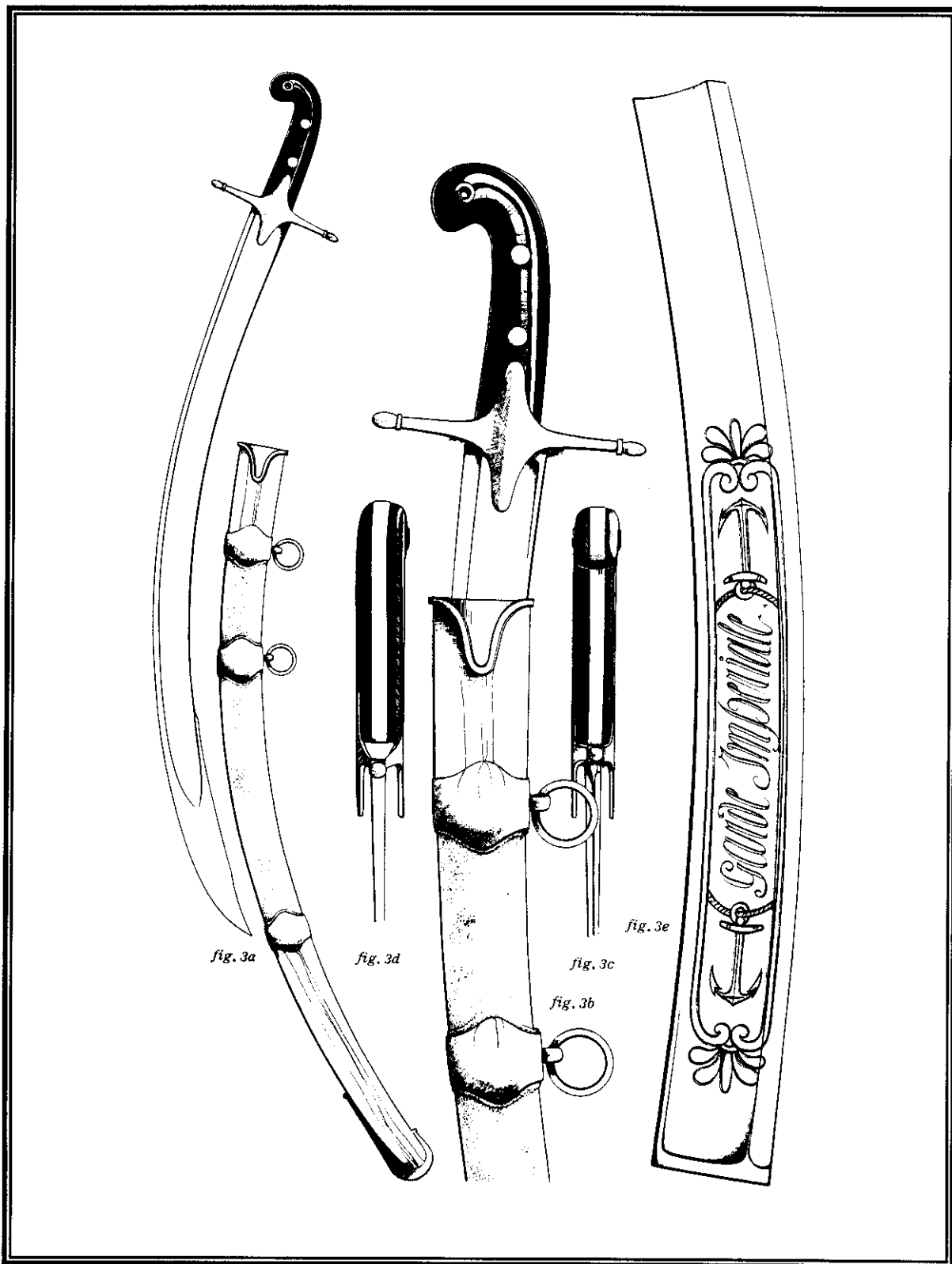


Figure 3. Sabre of the 1<sup>ère</sup> maître des Marins de la Garde Impériale.

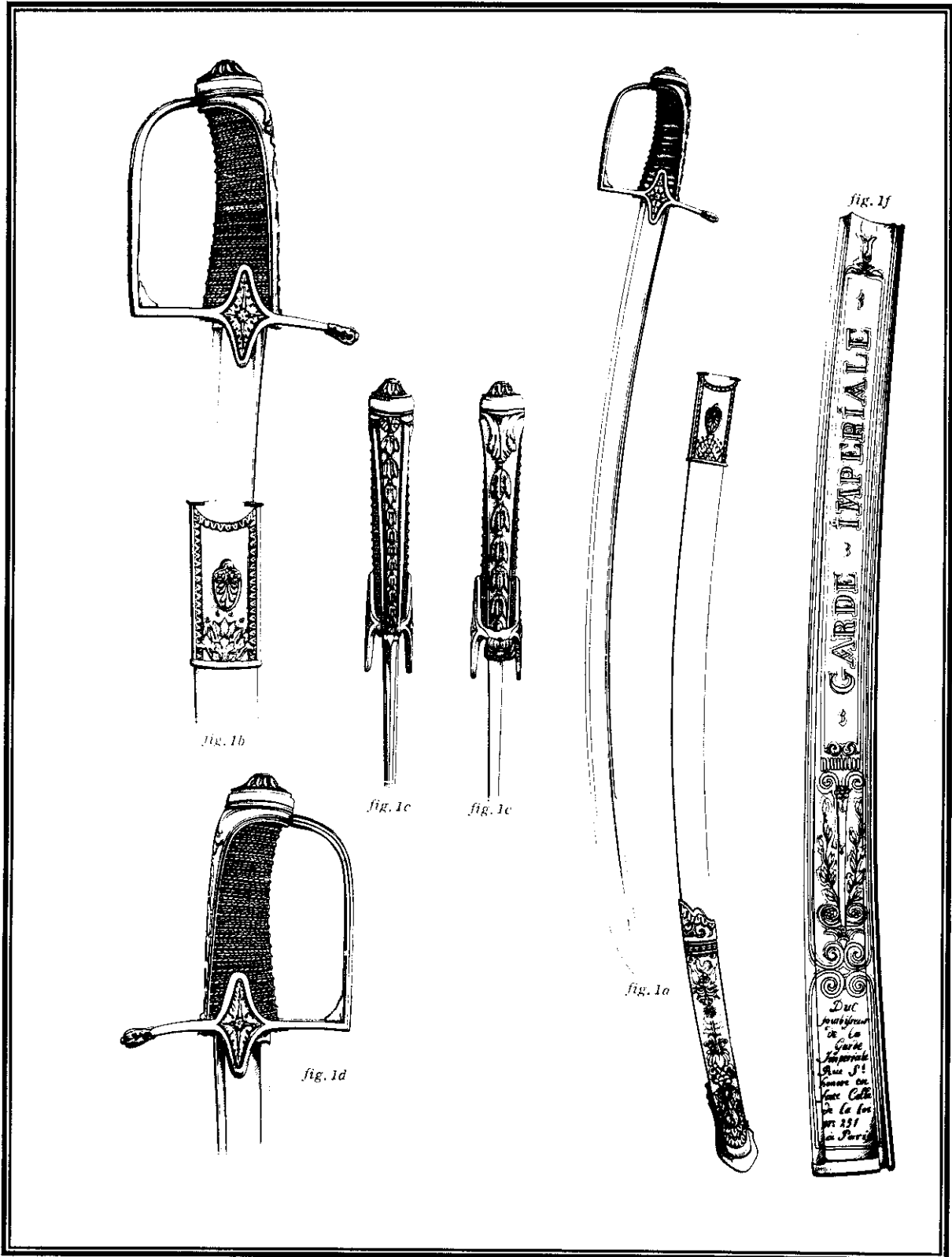


Figure 1. Sabre of the corps des Marins de la Garde Impériale (Musée de l'armée).

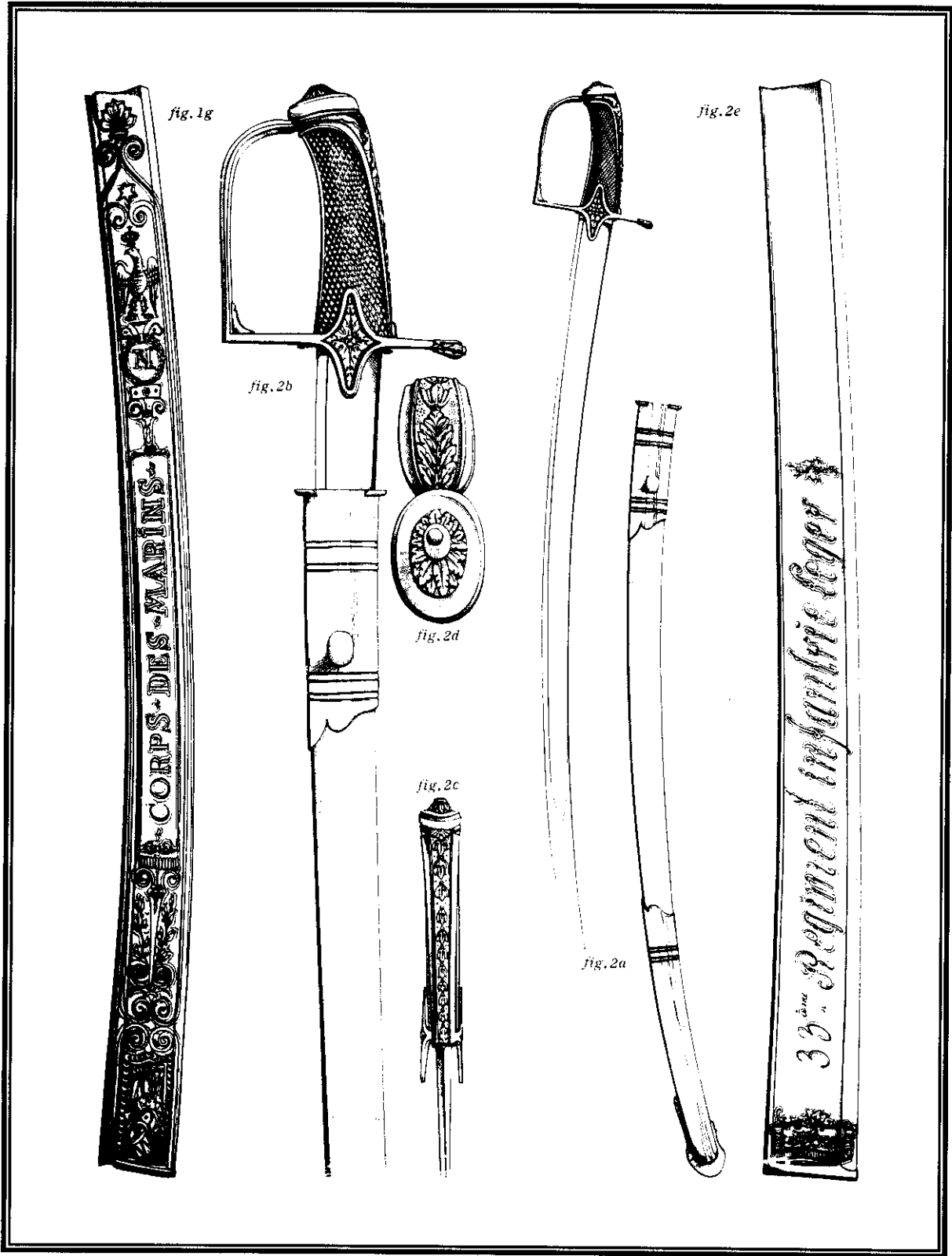
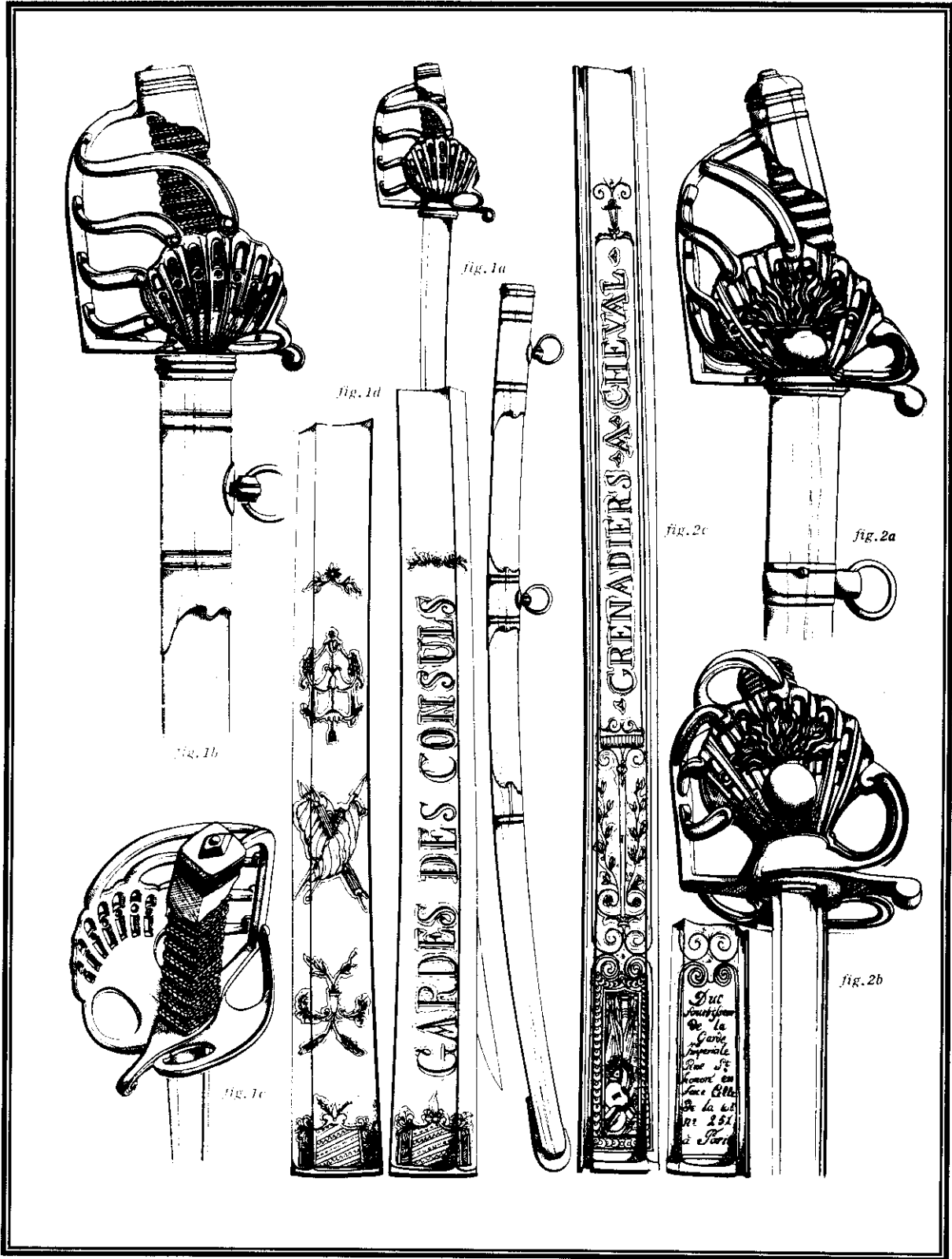


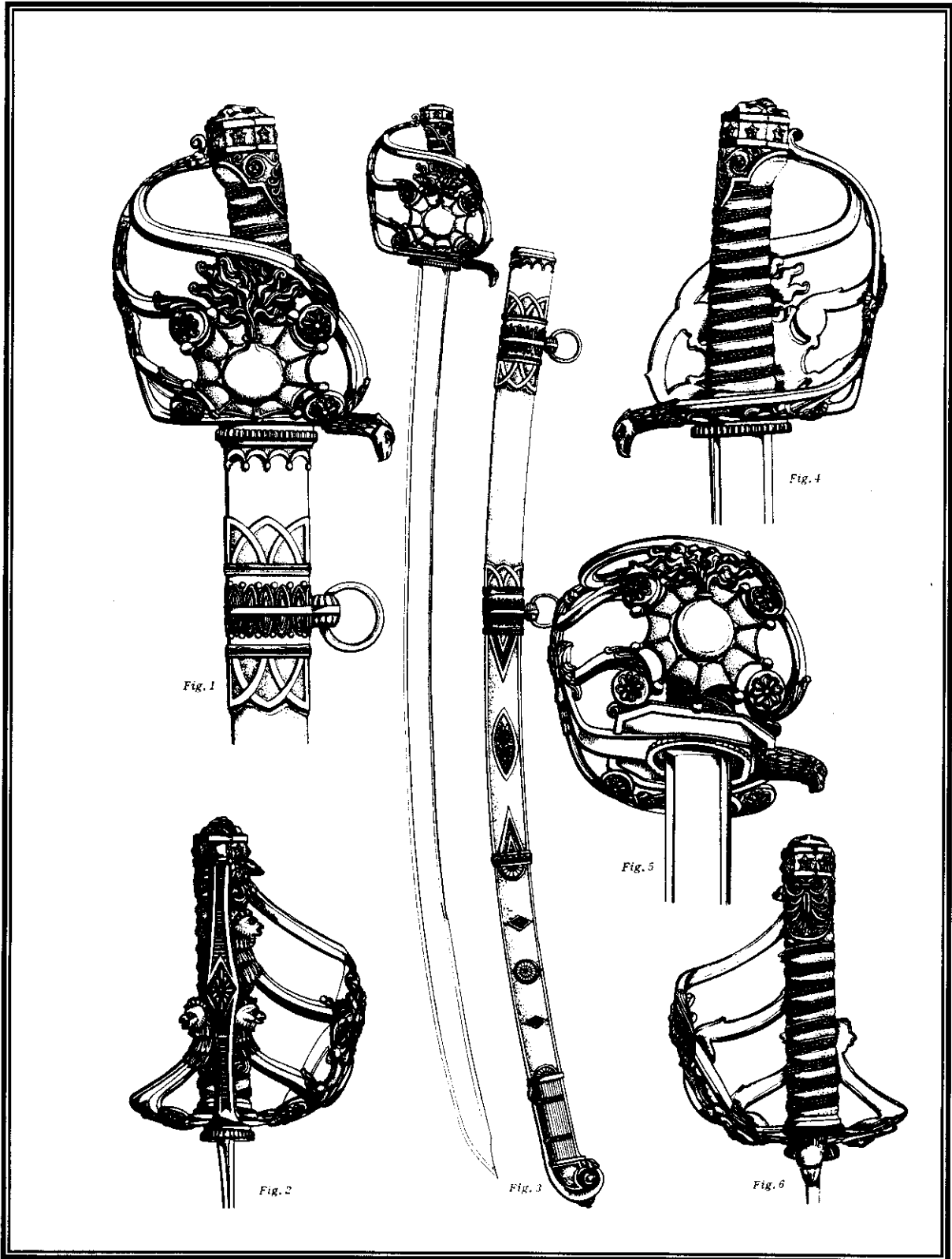
Figure 1. Sabre of the corps des Marins de la Garde Impériale (Musée de l'armée).  
Figure 2. Officer's sabre of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Light Infantry Regiment (Coll. Dr. Hutin).



First swords of the Grenadiers à Cheval de la Garde (Musée de l'armée)

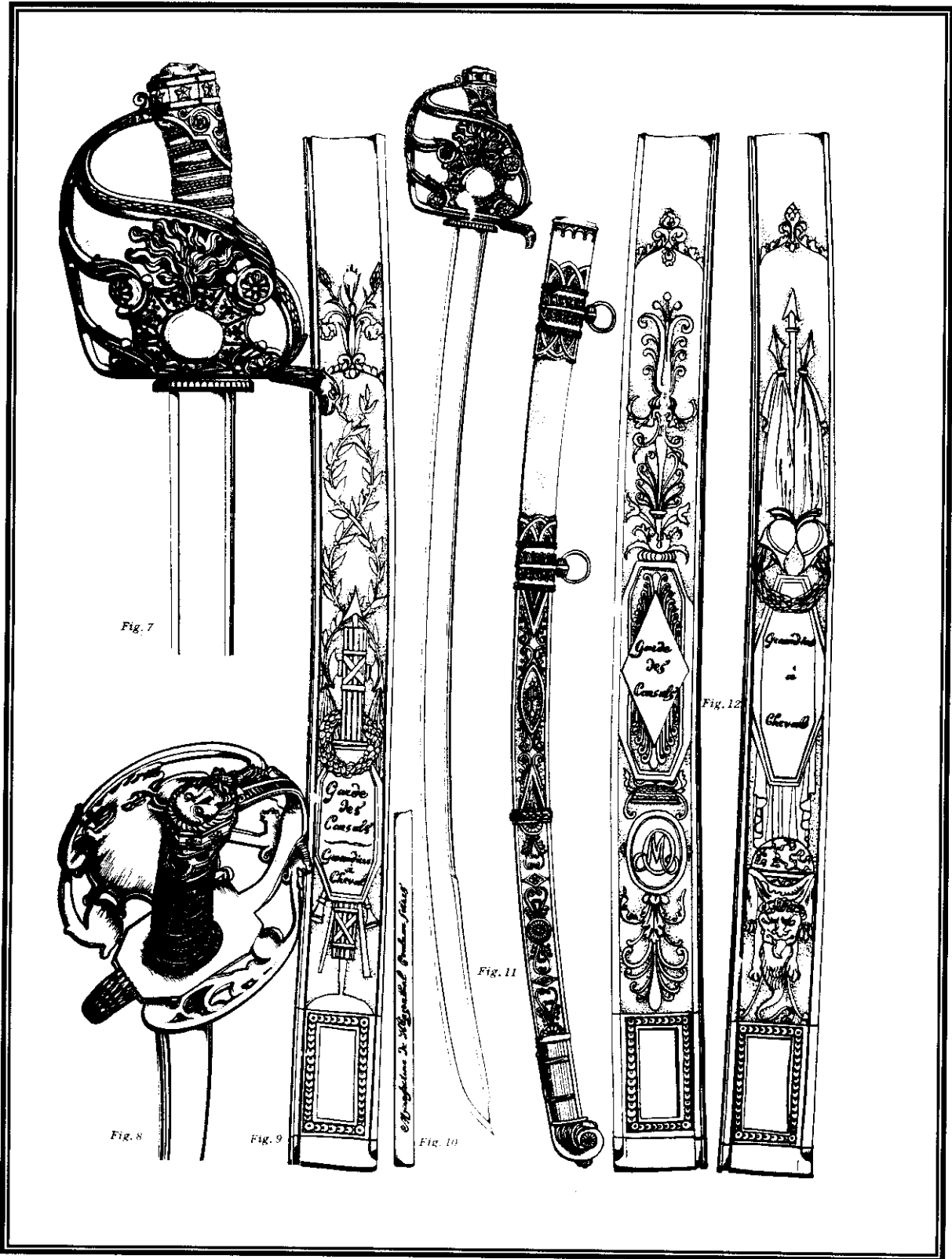
Figure 1. Consulat (1800-1804)

Figure 2. Debut of the Empire (1804-1805)

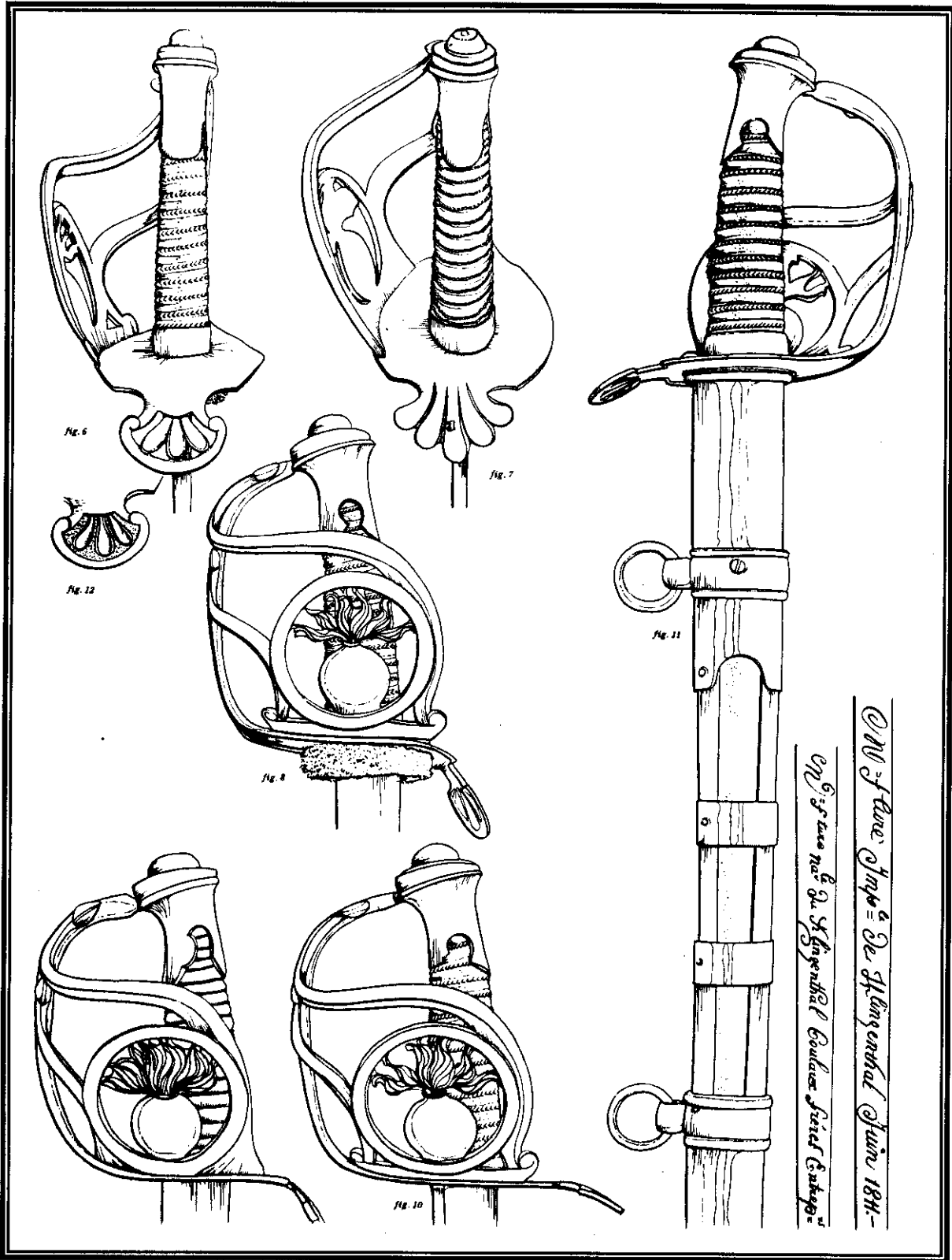


Figures 1-6. Sabre of the officer, the Grenadiers à Cheval de la Garde Impériale, 1802-1815  
(No. 05901, Musée de l'Empéri).

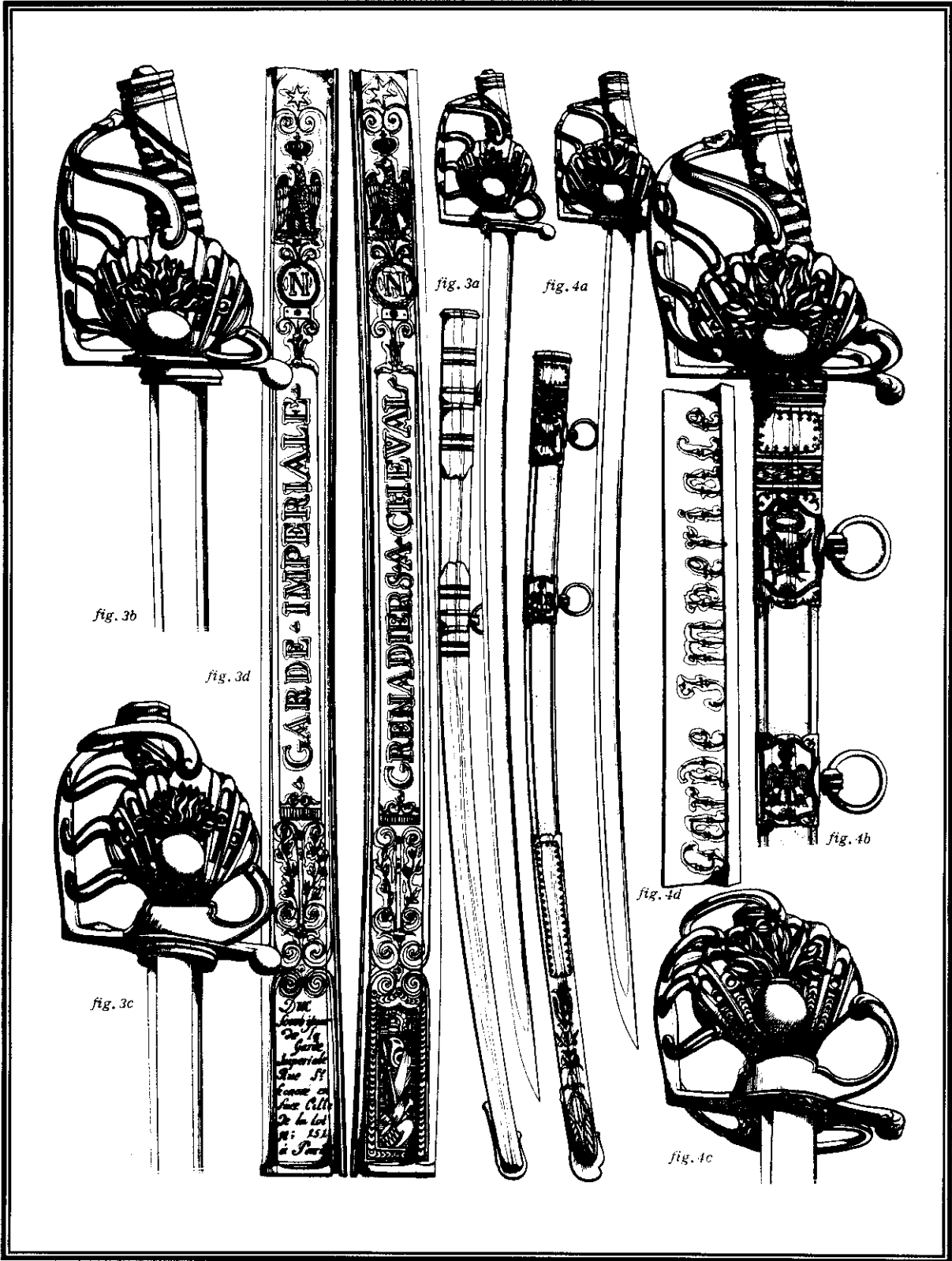




Figures 7-12. Sabre of the officer, the Grenadiers à Cheval de la Garde Impériale (No. J.423, Musée de l'armée).



Figures 6-8, 10-12. Sabres of the Grenadiers à Cheval de la Garde Impériale, An XI (1802-1803).  
 Figure 9. Sabre of the Grenadiers à Cheval de la Garde Impériale, An IX, were distributed in  
 1801-1802 (Musée de l'armée).



Swords of the Grenadiers à Cheval de la Garde, epoch of Empire:  
Musée of Lorraine, Nancy (Figure 3) and Musée de l'armée (Figure 4).

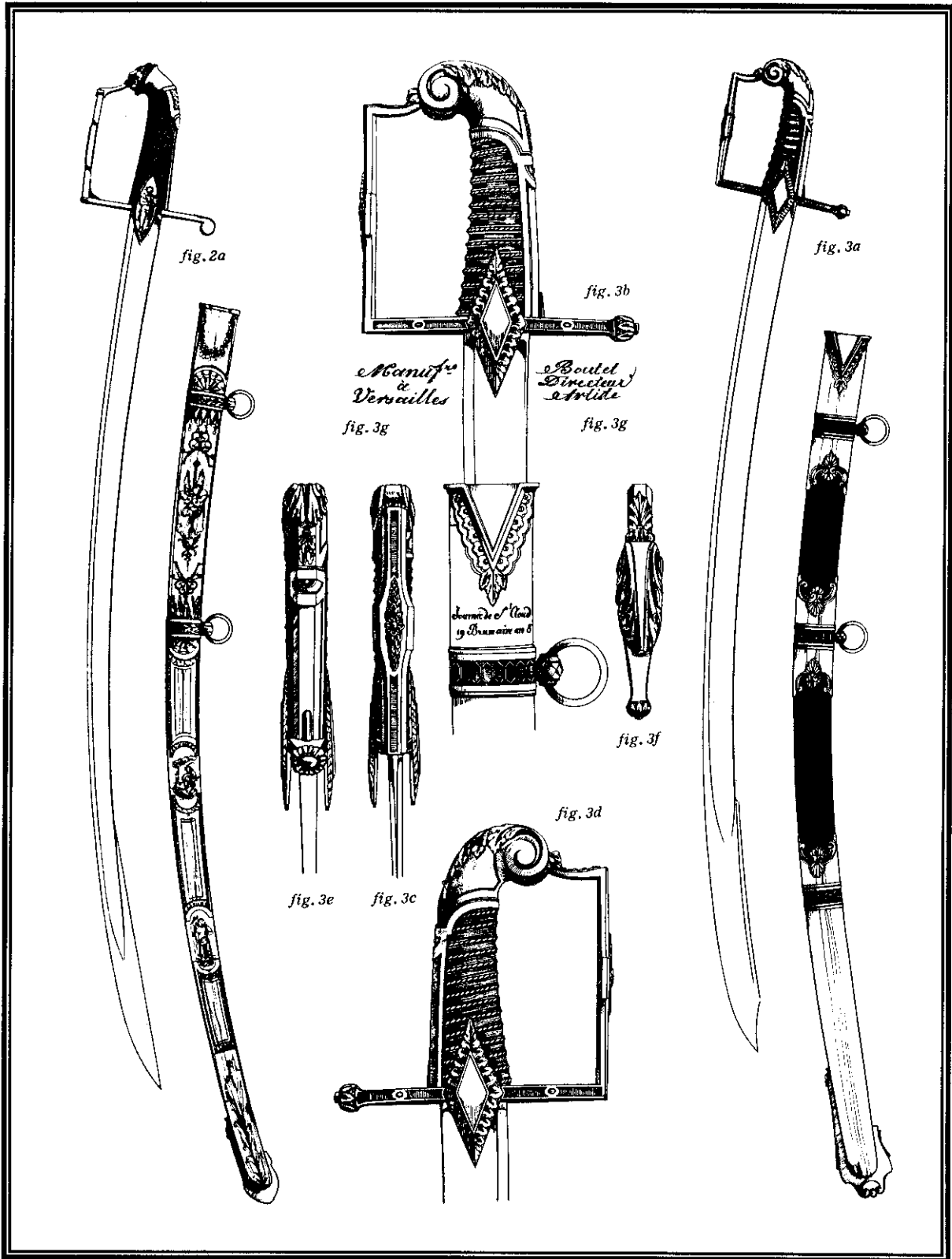


Figure 2. Officer's sabre of the St.-Luke, Chasseurs à Cheval (Coll. Raoul & Jean Brunon).

Figure 3. Sabre issued to commemorate the event as St.-Cloud, 19 Brumaire (Musée de l'armée).

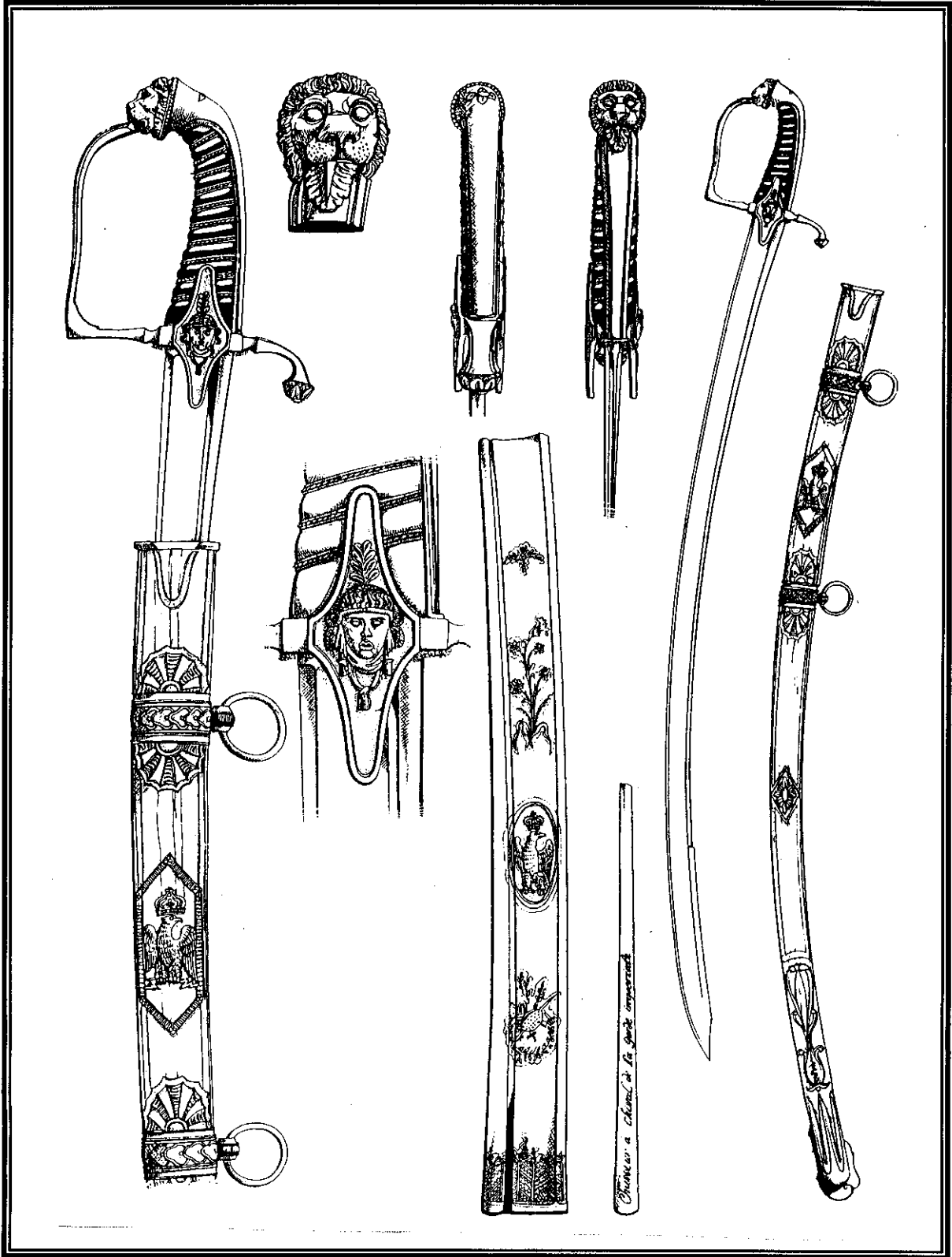
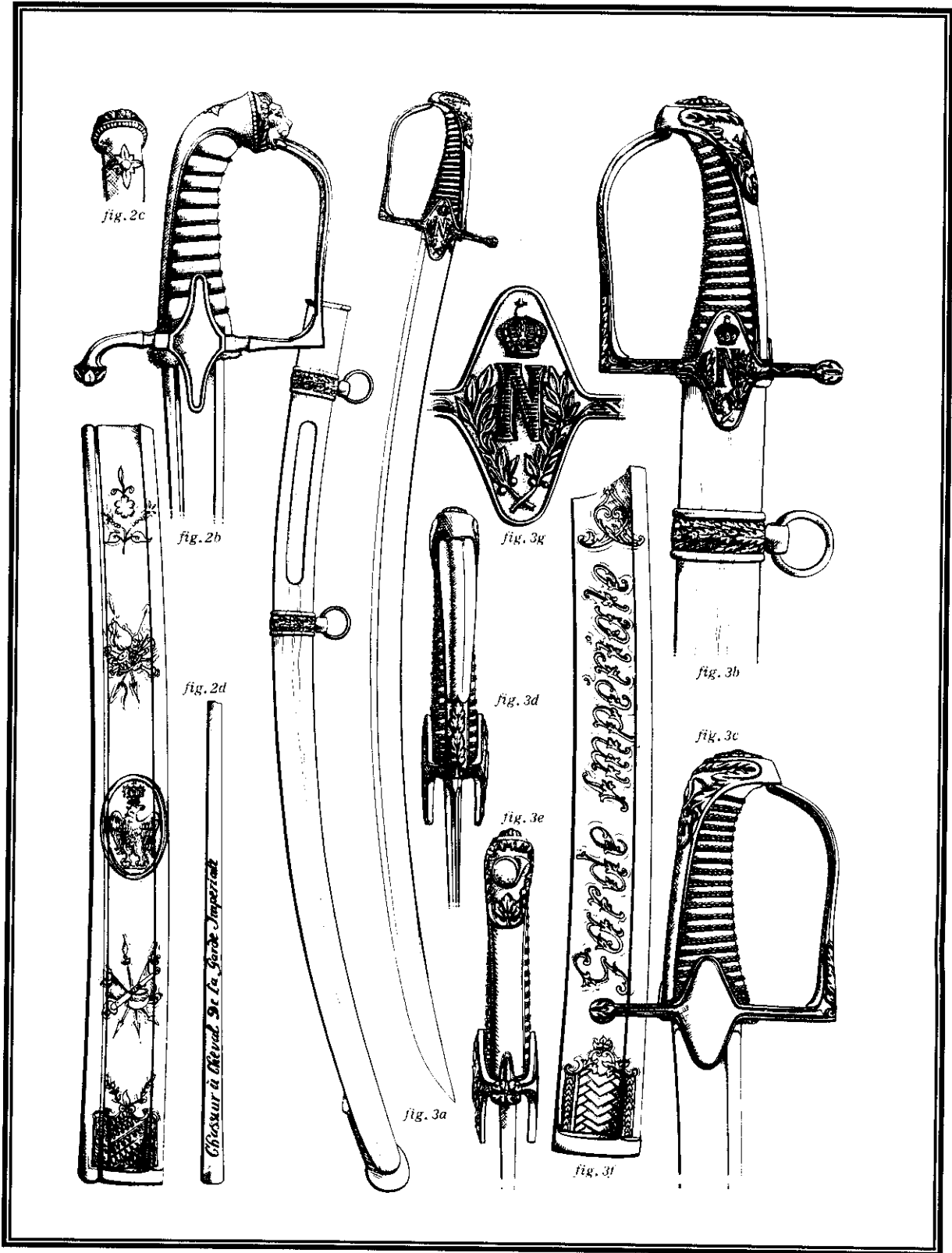
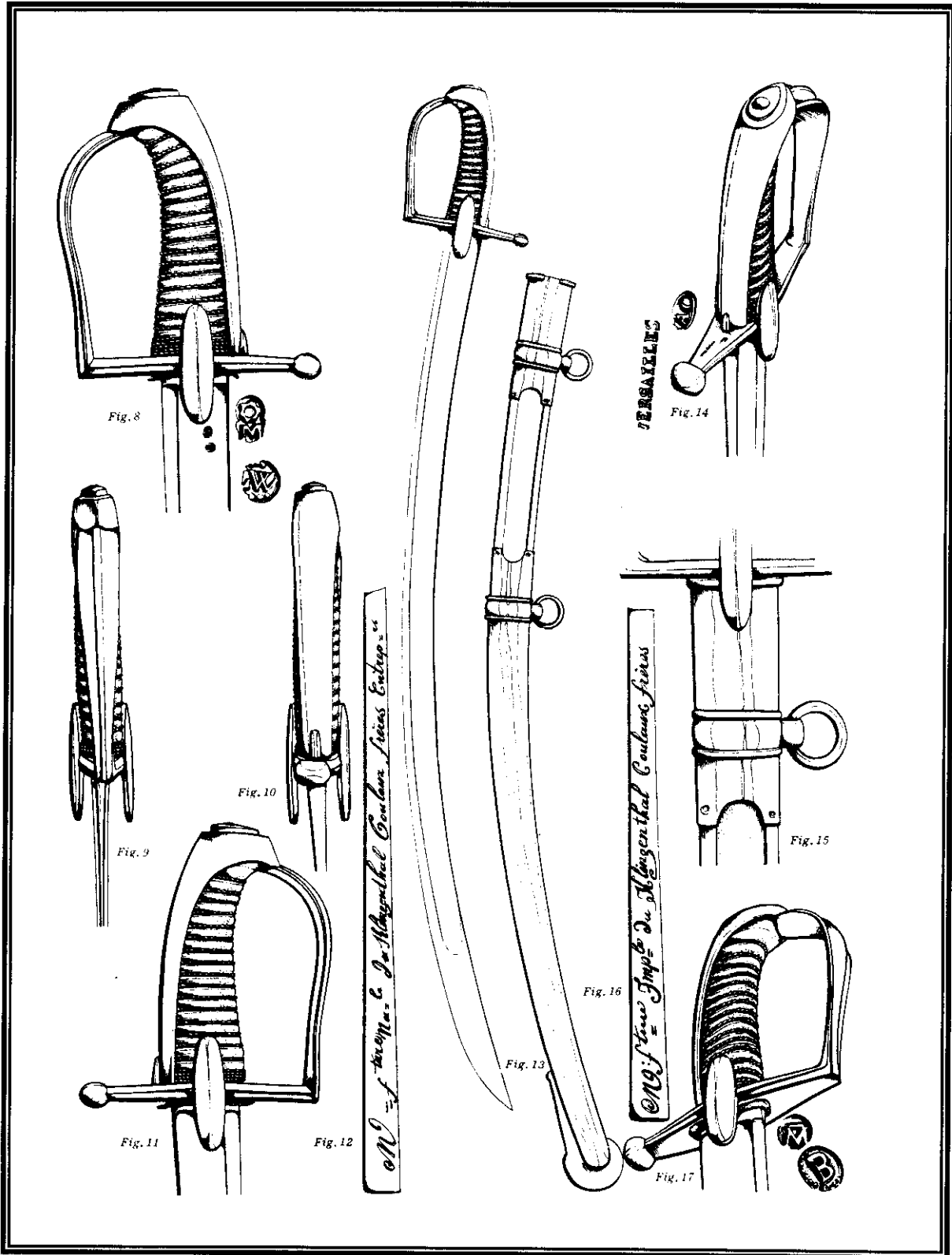


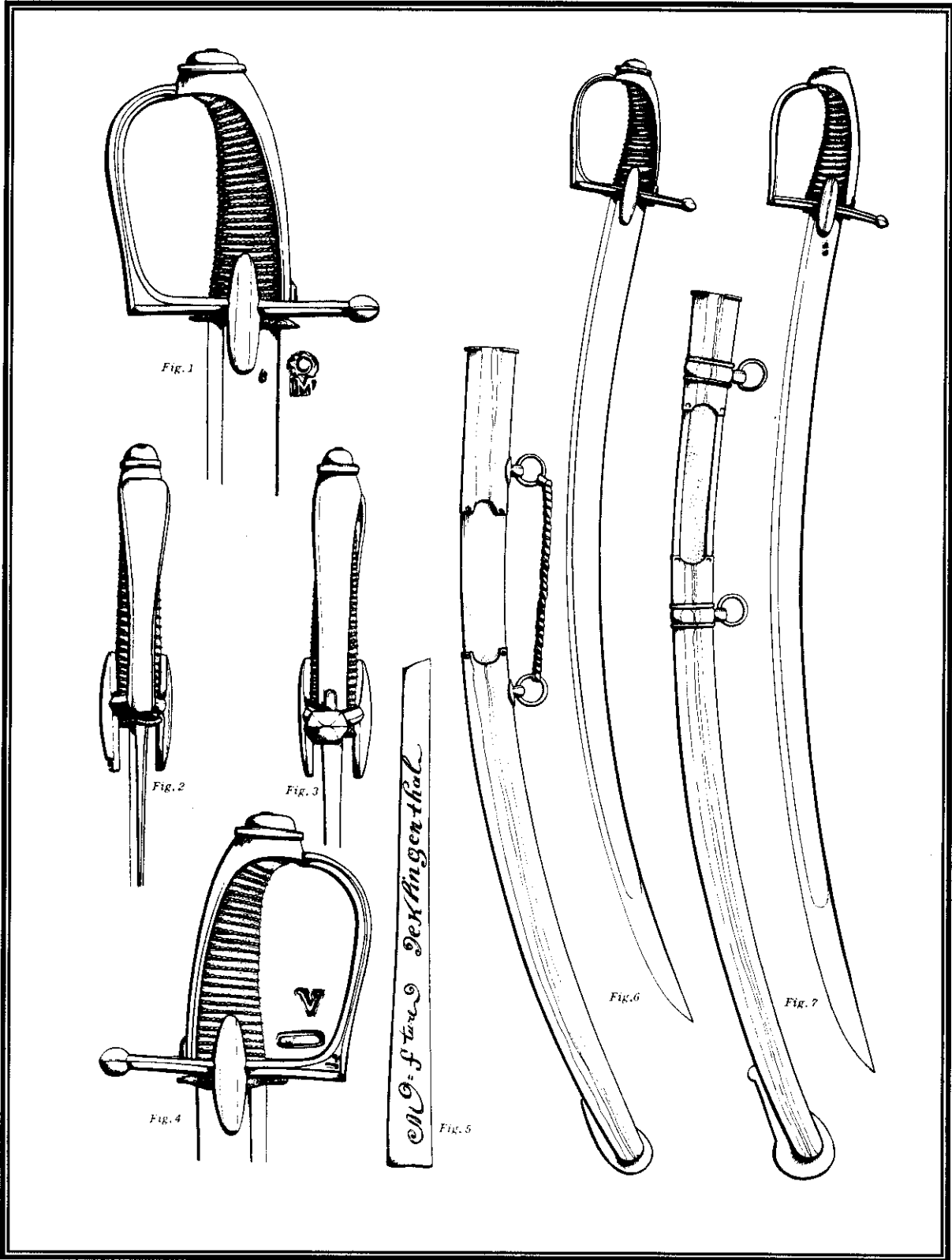
Figure 1. Sabre "à la Marengo" of an officer of the Chasseurs à Cheval de la Garde Impériale (Coll. Musée de l'Empéri).



Figures 2,3. Sabres "à la Hussard" of an officer of the Chasseurs à Cheval de la Garde Impériale (Coll. Raoul & Jean Brunon, Musée de l'armée).



Figures 8-17. Sabres of the Chasseurs à Cheval de la Garde, epoch of Empire (Musée de l'armée).



Figures 1-7. Sabres of the Chasseurs à Cheval de la Garde, 1800-1815.  
(Musée de l'armée).



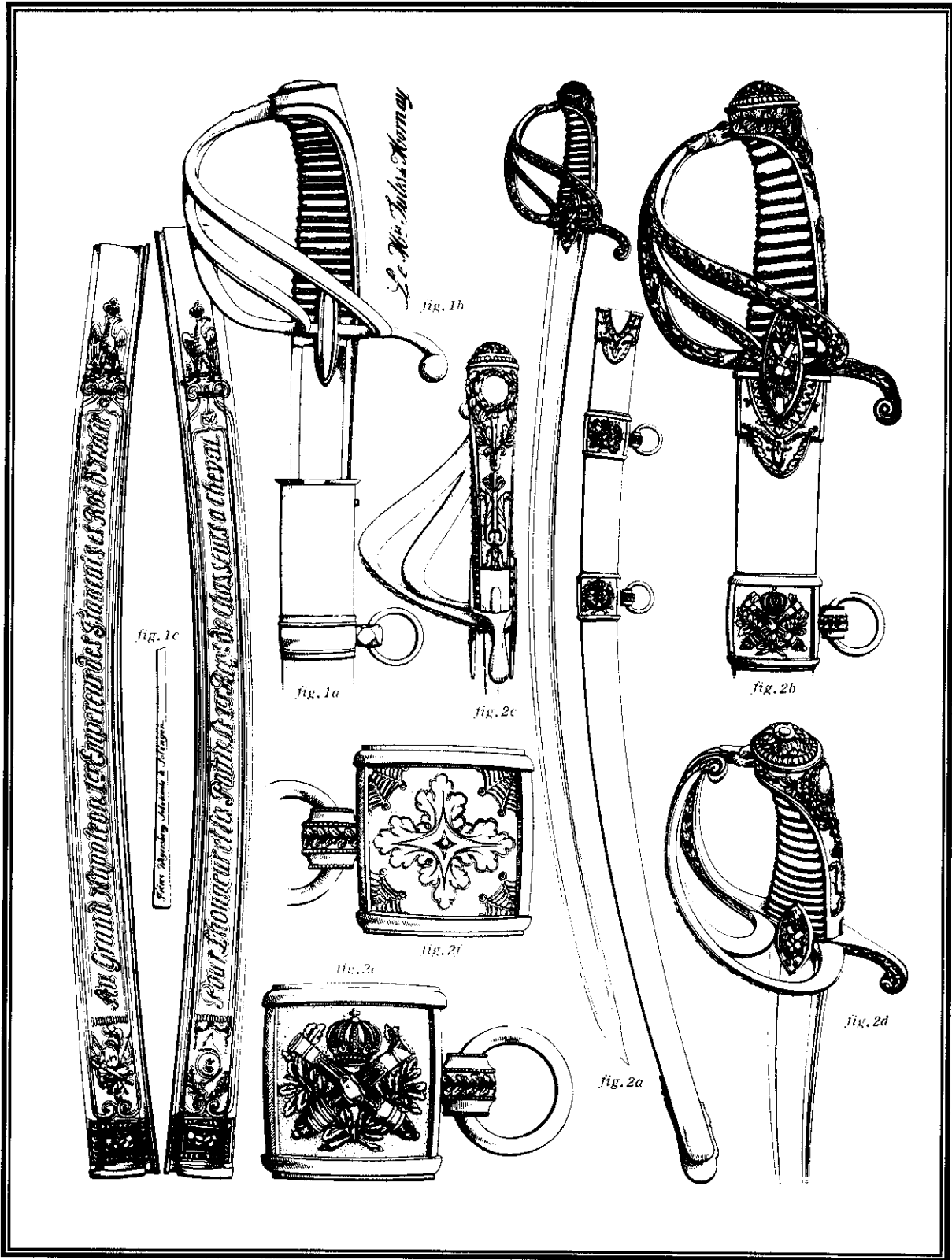
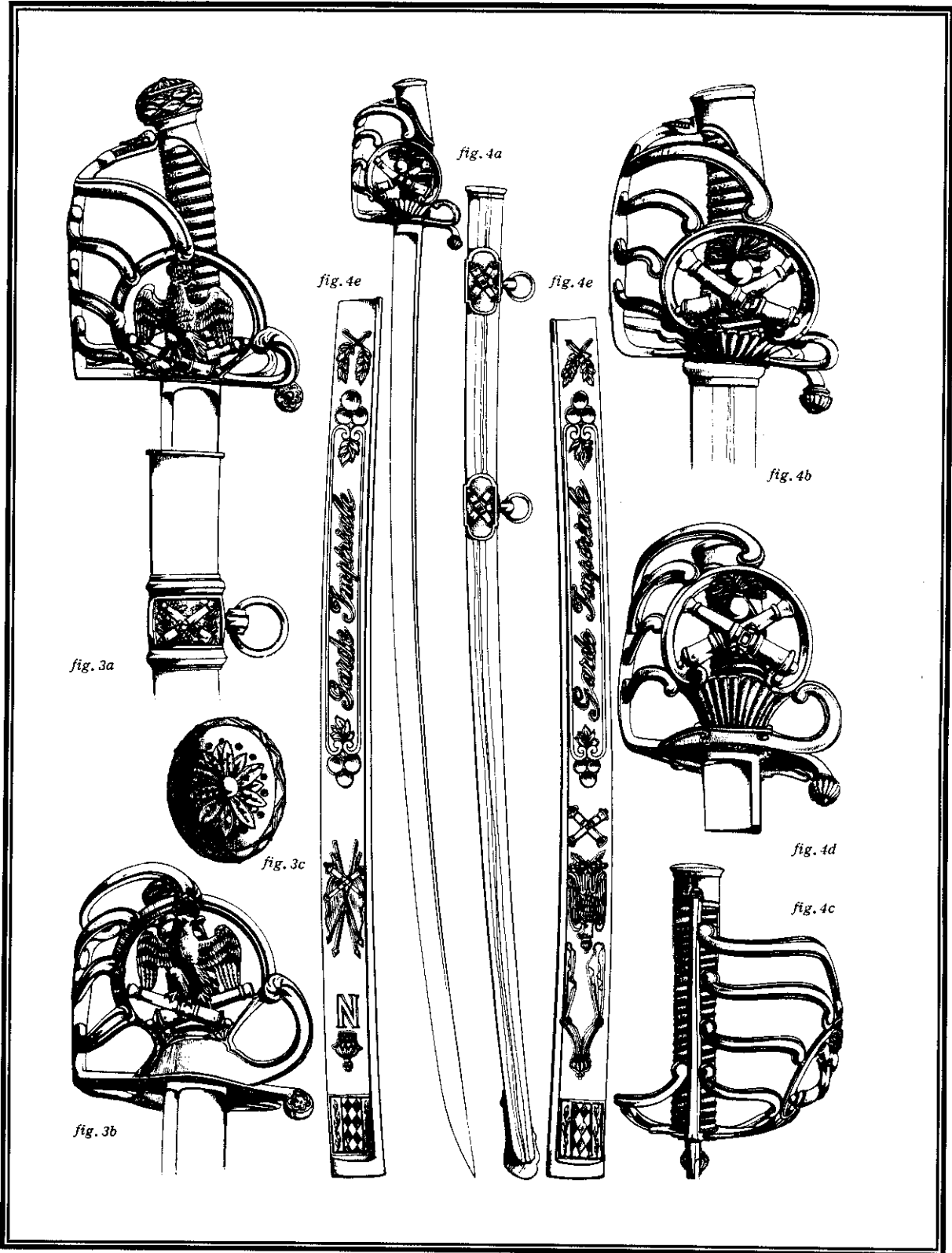


Figure 1. Officer's sabre of the Chasseur à Cheval de la Garde Impériale (Coll. Dr. Hutin).  
 Figure 2. Officer's sabre of the Artillery à Cheval, Empire (Musée de l'armée).



Figures 3-4. Sabres of the superior officers, Artillerie à Cheval de la Garde Impériale (Musée de l'Empéri).

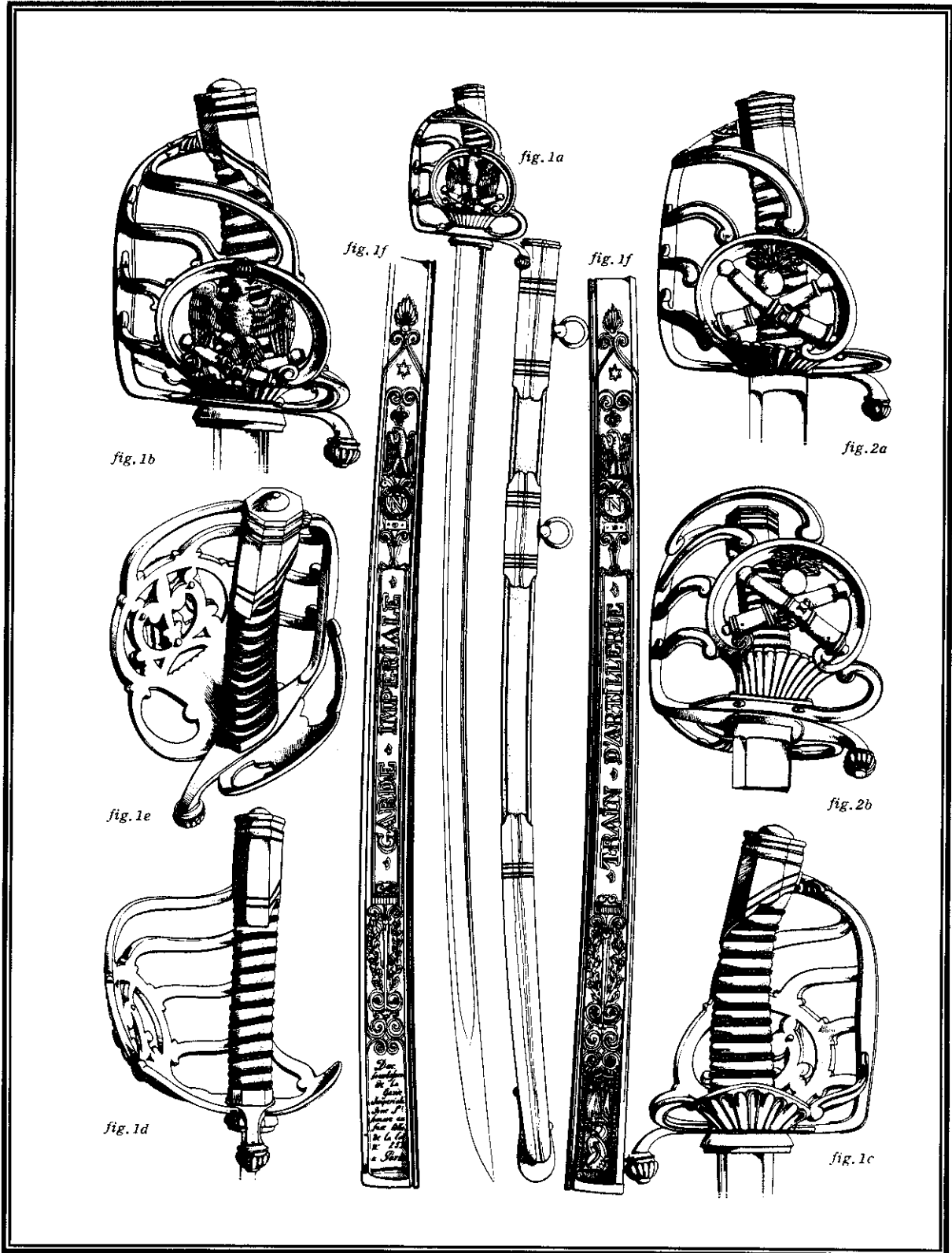
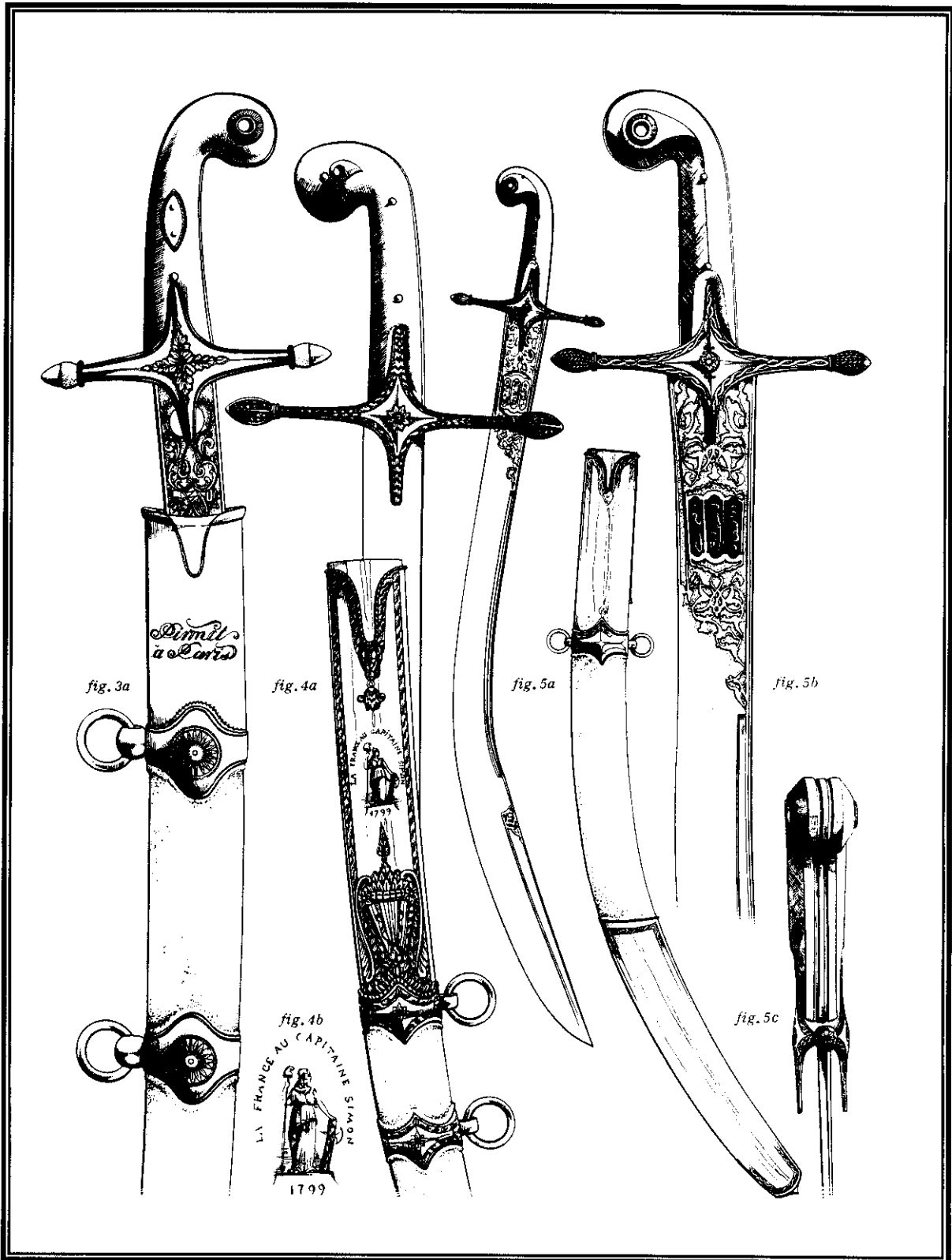


Figure 1. Sabre of the superior officer, Train d'artillerie de la Garde Impériale (Musée de Nancy).  
Figure 2. Sabre of the superior officer, Artillerie à Cheval de la Garde Impériale.



Figures 3-4. "Egyptian" sabres, presented as a reward, 1799.

Figure 5. Mamcluke's sabre, Oriental design and pattern (Musée de l'armée).

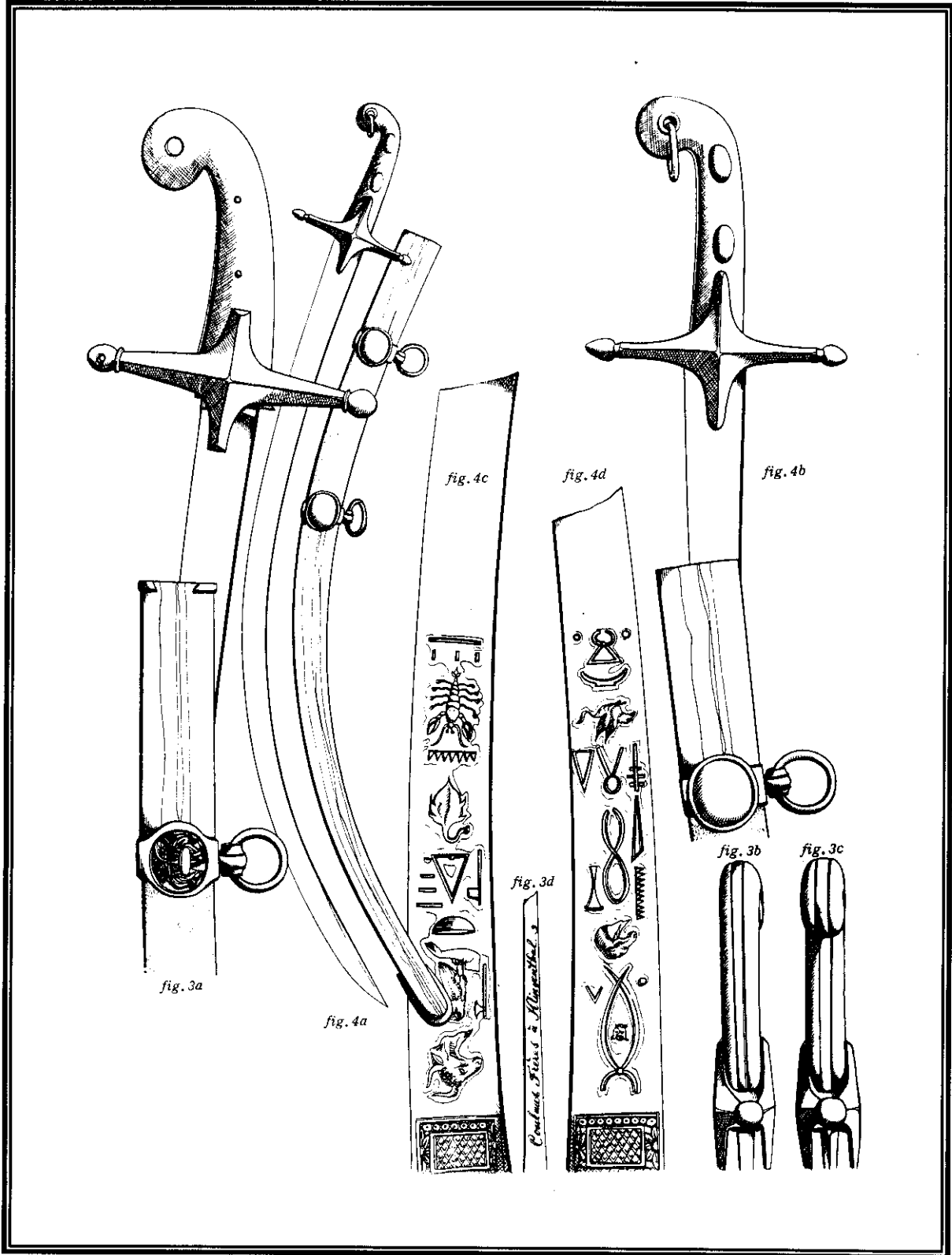
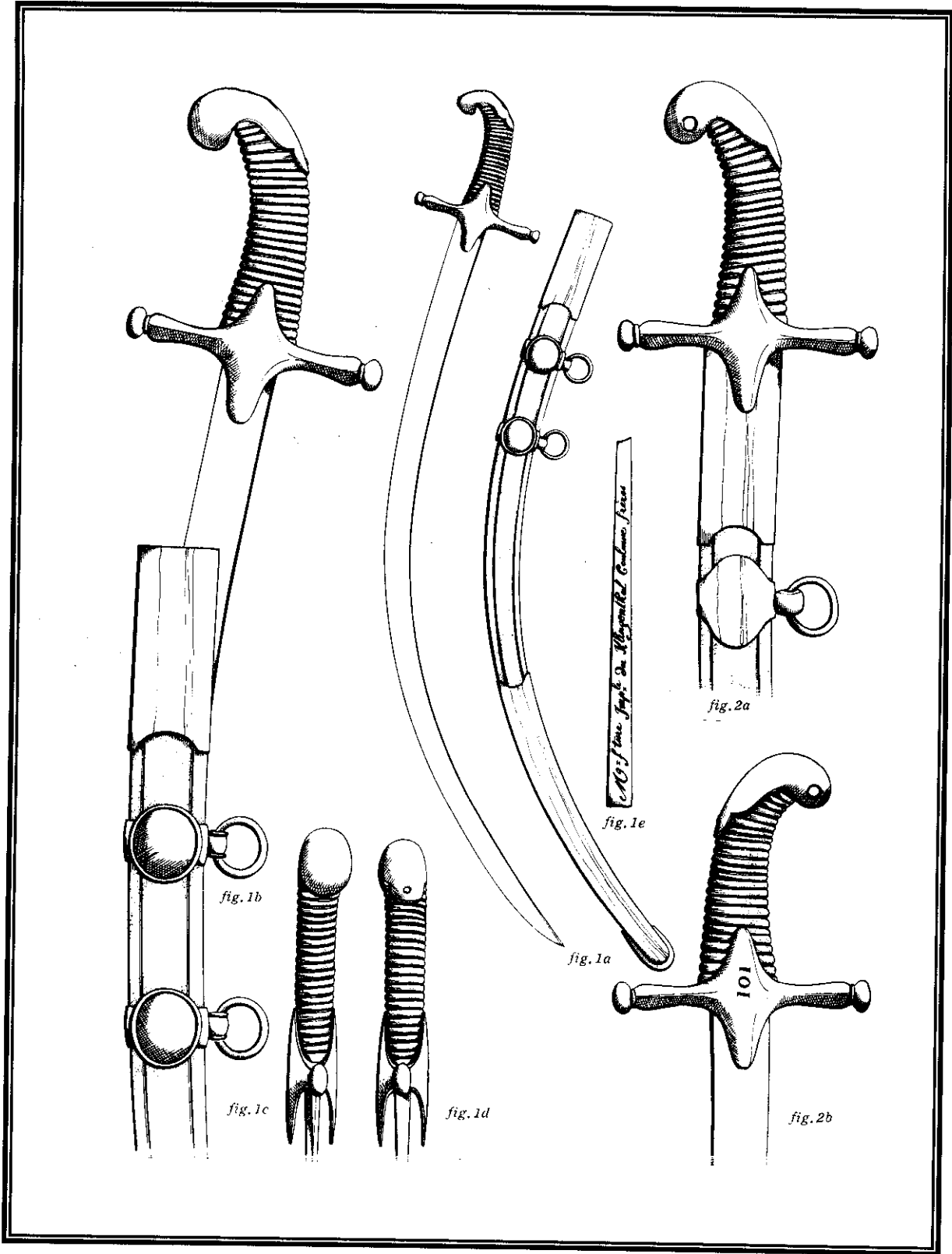
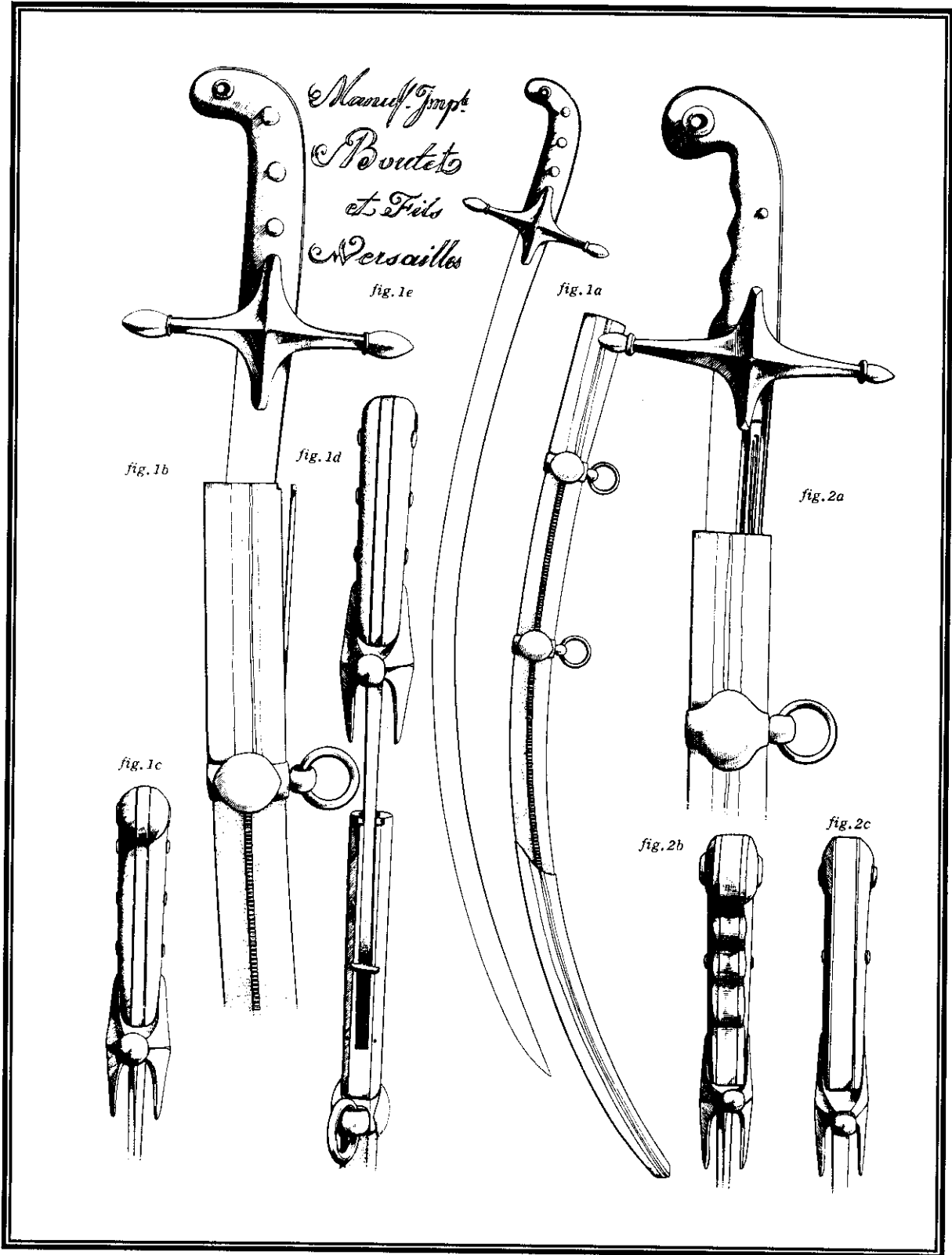


Figure 3-4. Sabres of the Mameluke officer (Coll. Raoul & Jean Brunon).



Figures 1-2. Sabre of the Mamelukes (No. J493/1, Musée de l'armée).



Figures 1-2. "Egyptian" sabres, manufacture de Versailles, France.

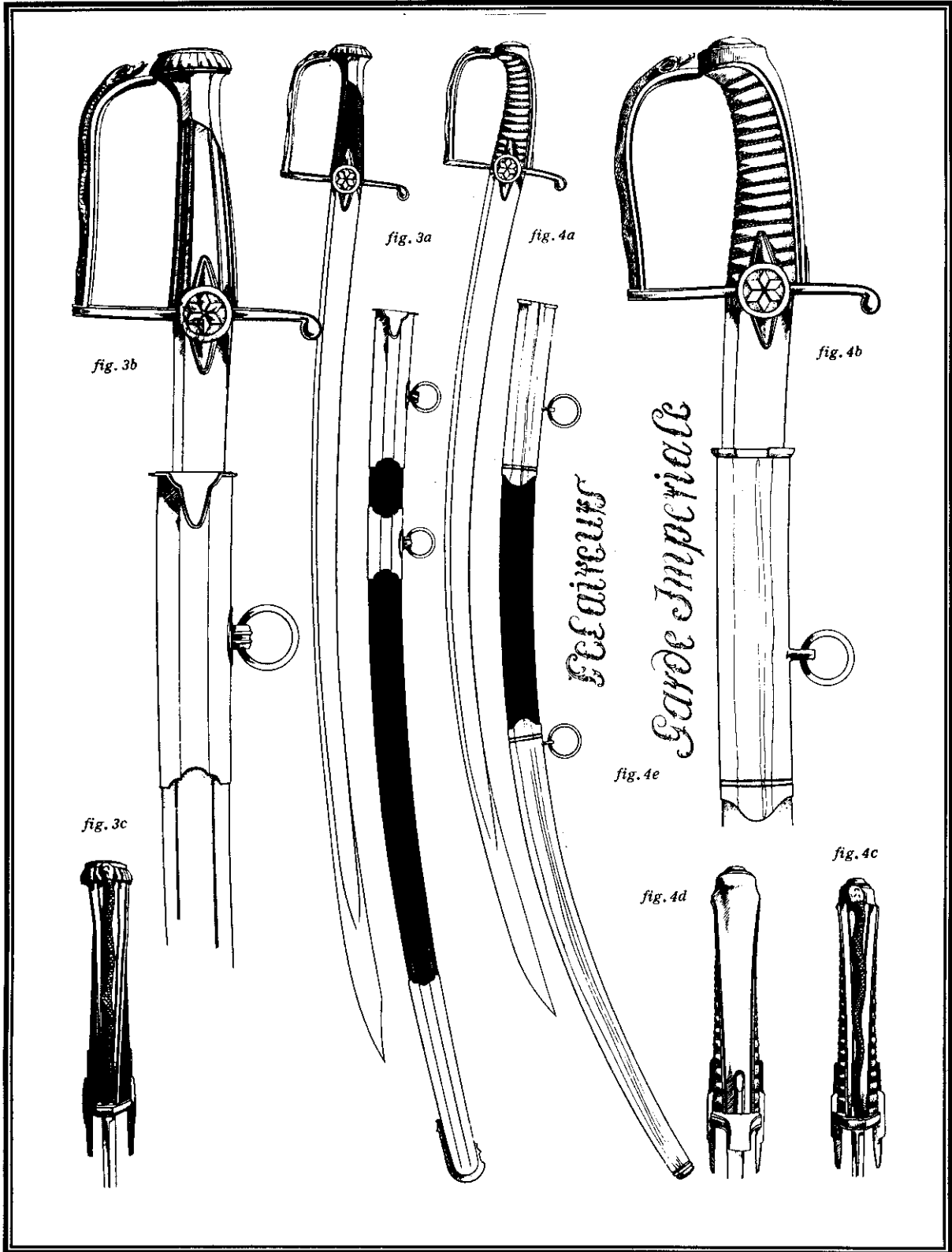


Figure 3. Officer's sabre of des Éclaireurs Regiment de la Garde Impériale (Coll. Cochelin)

Figure 4. Trooper's sabre of des Éclaireurs Regiment de la Garde Impériale (Coll. Dr. Hutin).



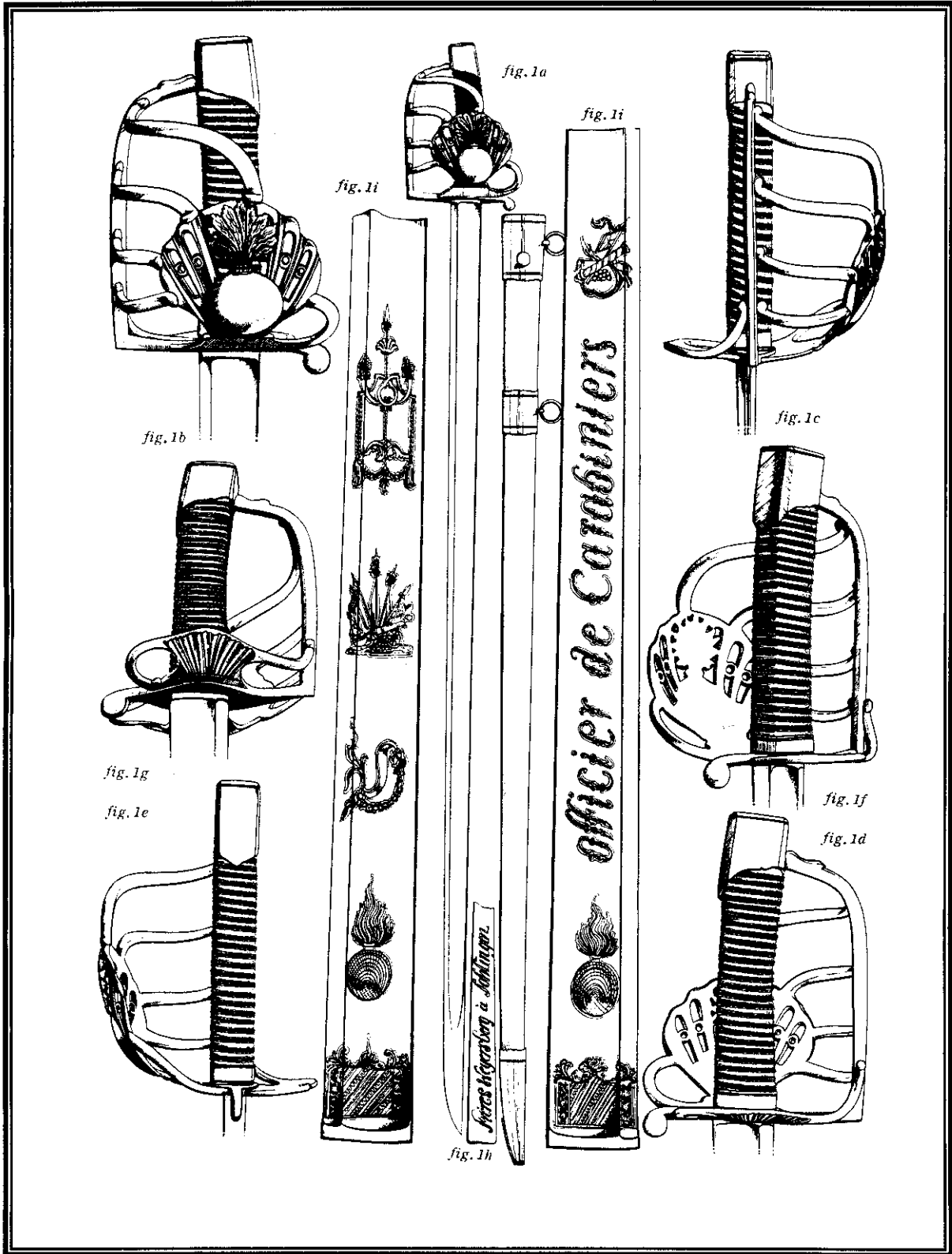
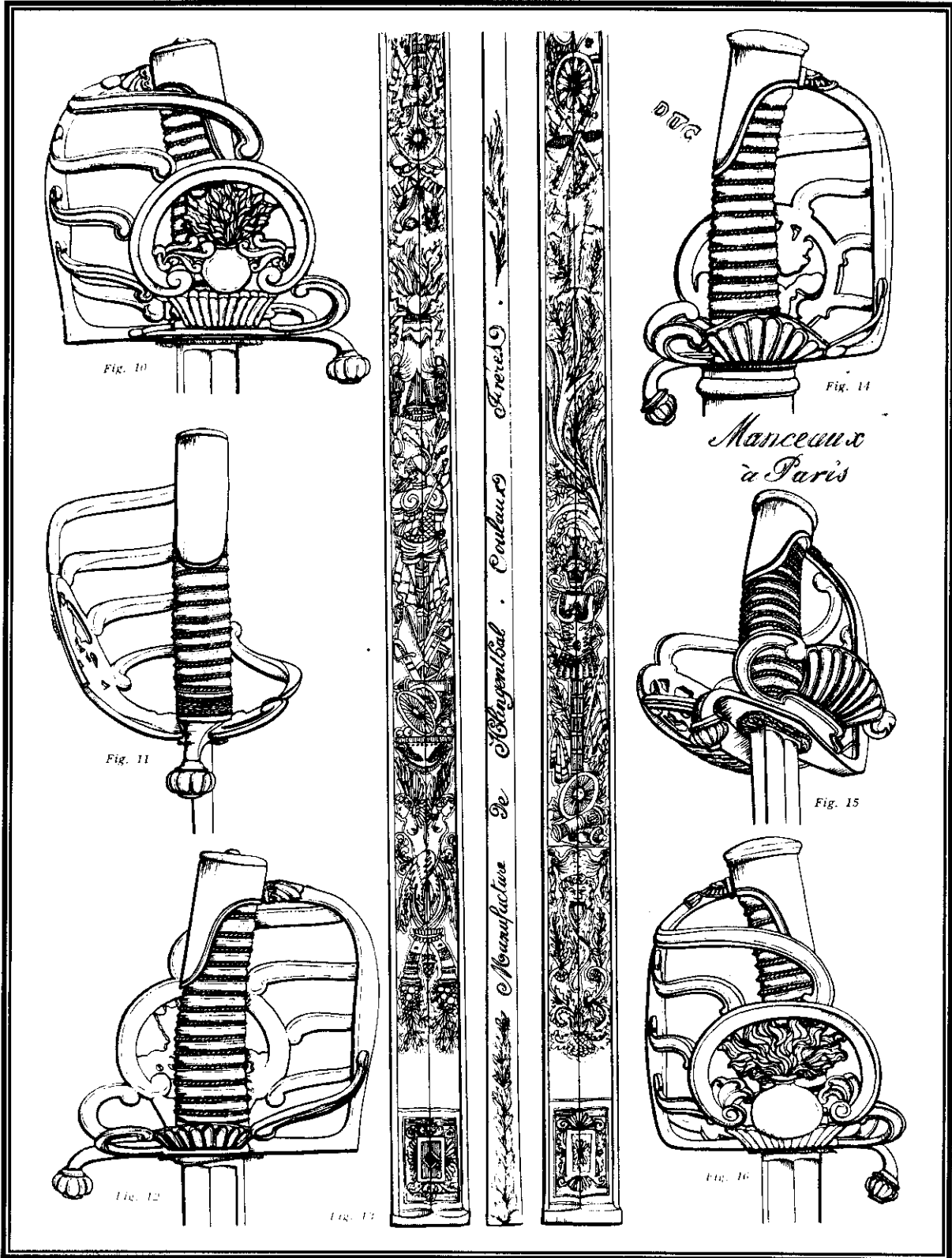
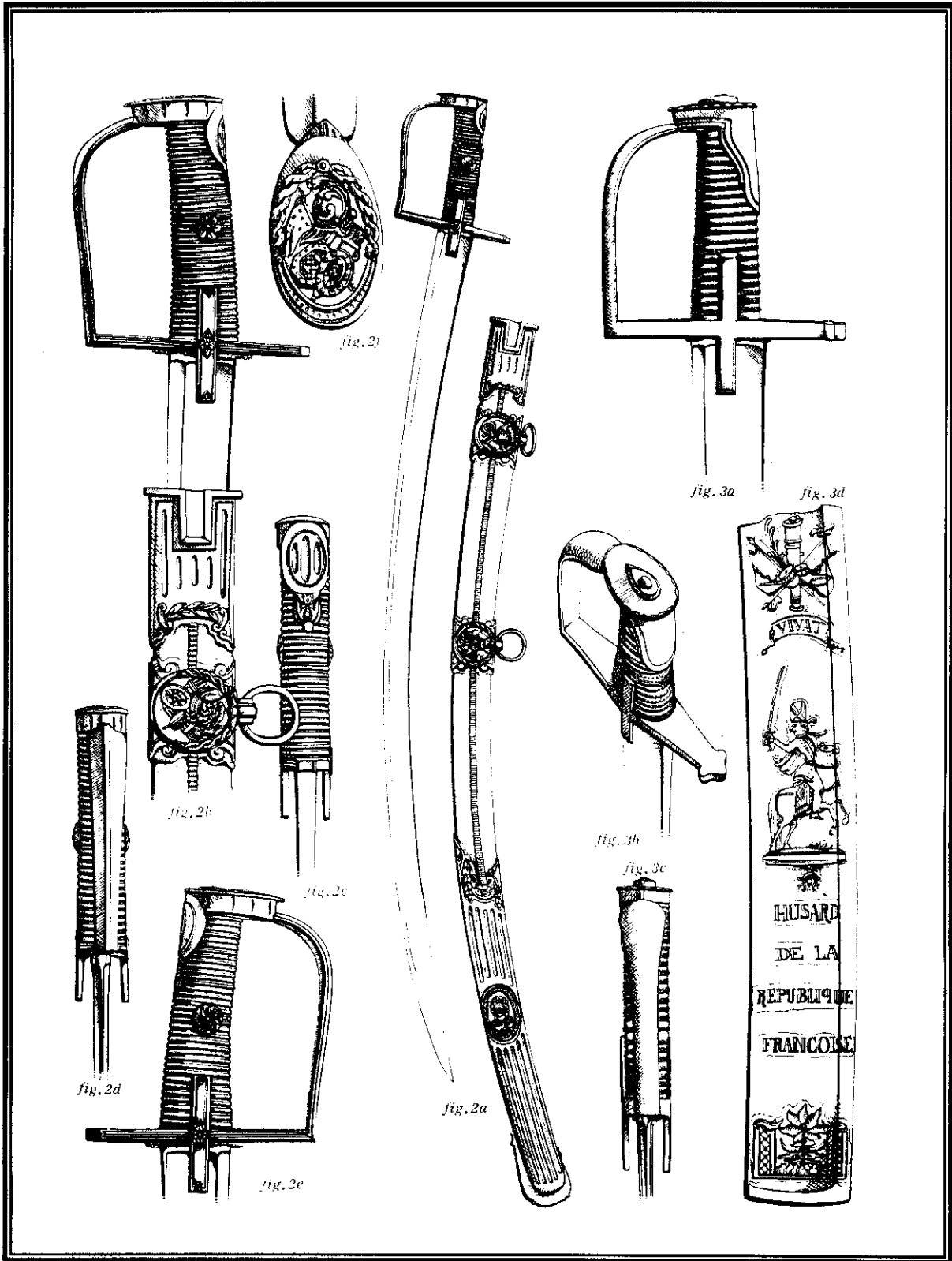


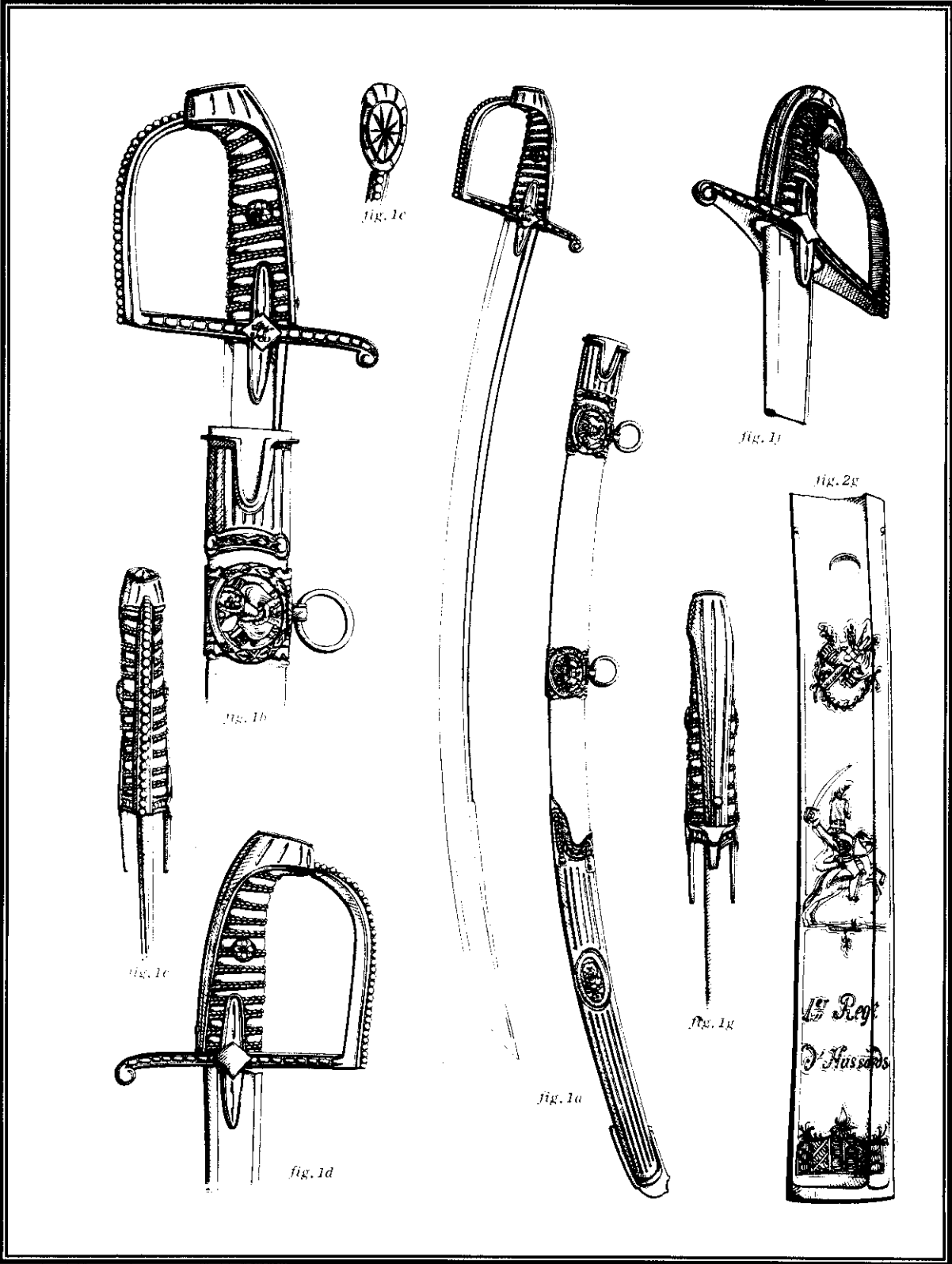
Figure 1. Sabre of the Carabiniers' officer, epoch of the Consulat (Musée de l'armée, Château de l'Empéri).



Figures 10-16. Sabres of the Line cavalry officers, 1808-1817 (Musée de l'armée).



Sabres of the Hussar officers, type "à la Allemande".  
Figures 2-3. Epoch of the Republic and Consulate, various.



Sabres of the Hussar officers, type "à la Allemande".  
Figure 1. End of monarchy. Figure 2. Epoch of the Republic, various.

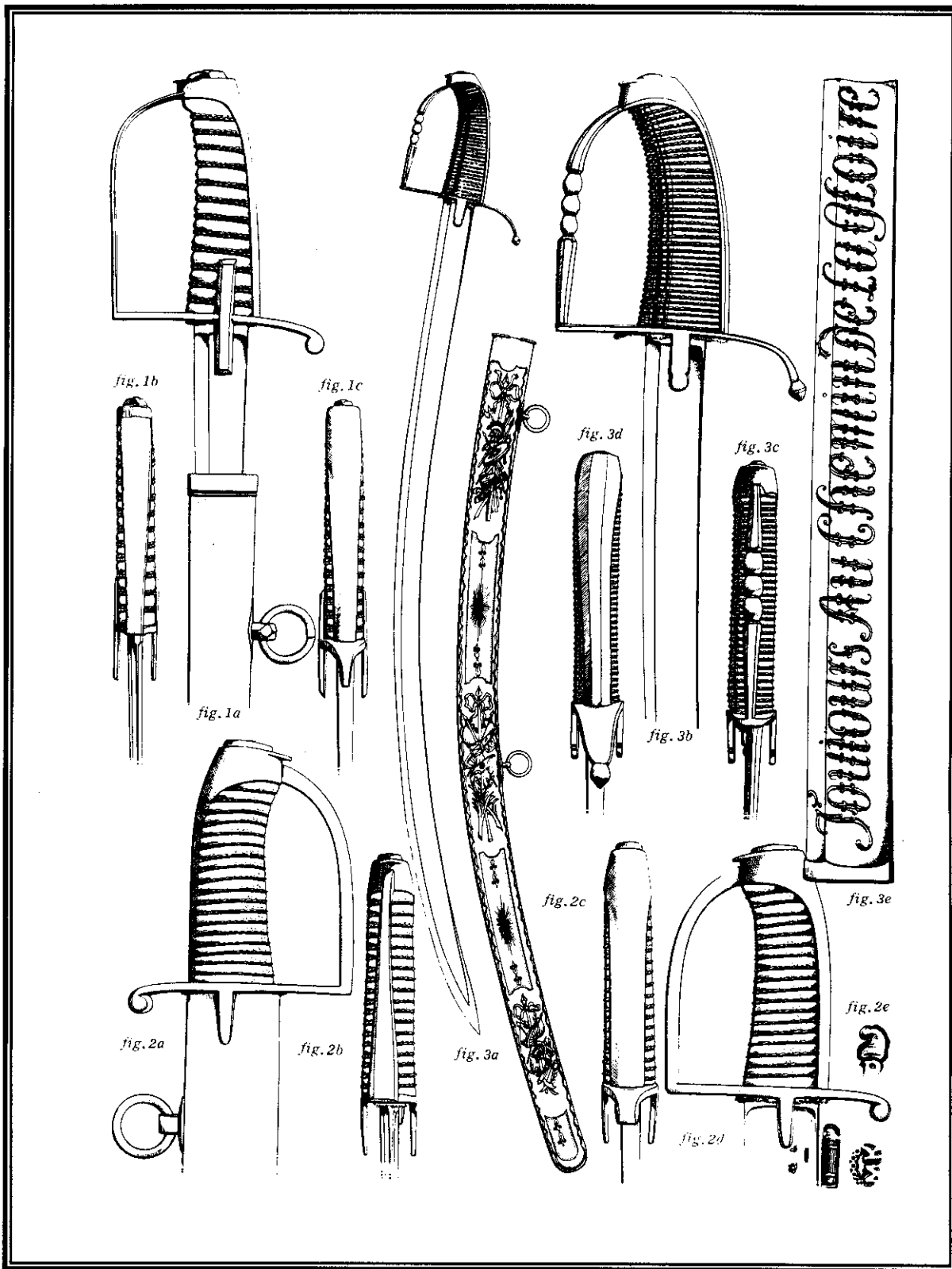


Figure 1-2. Officers' sabres of the Light cavalry.

Figure 3. Variation of the Light cavalry sabre (Musée International des Hussards, Tarbes).

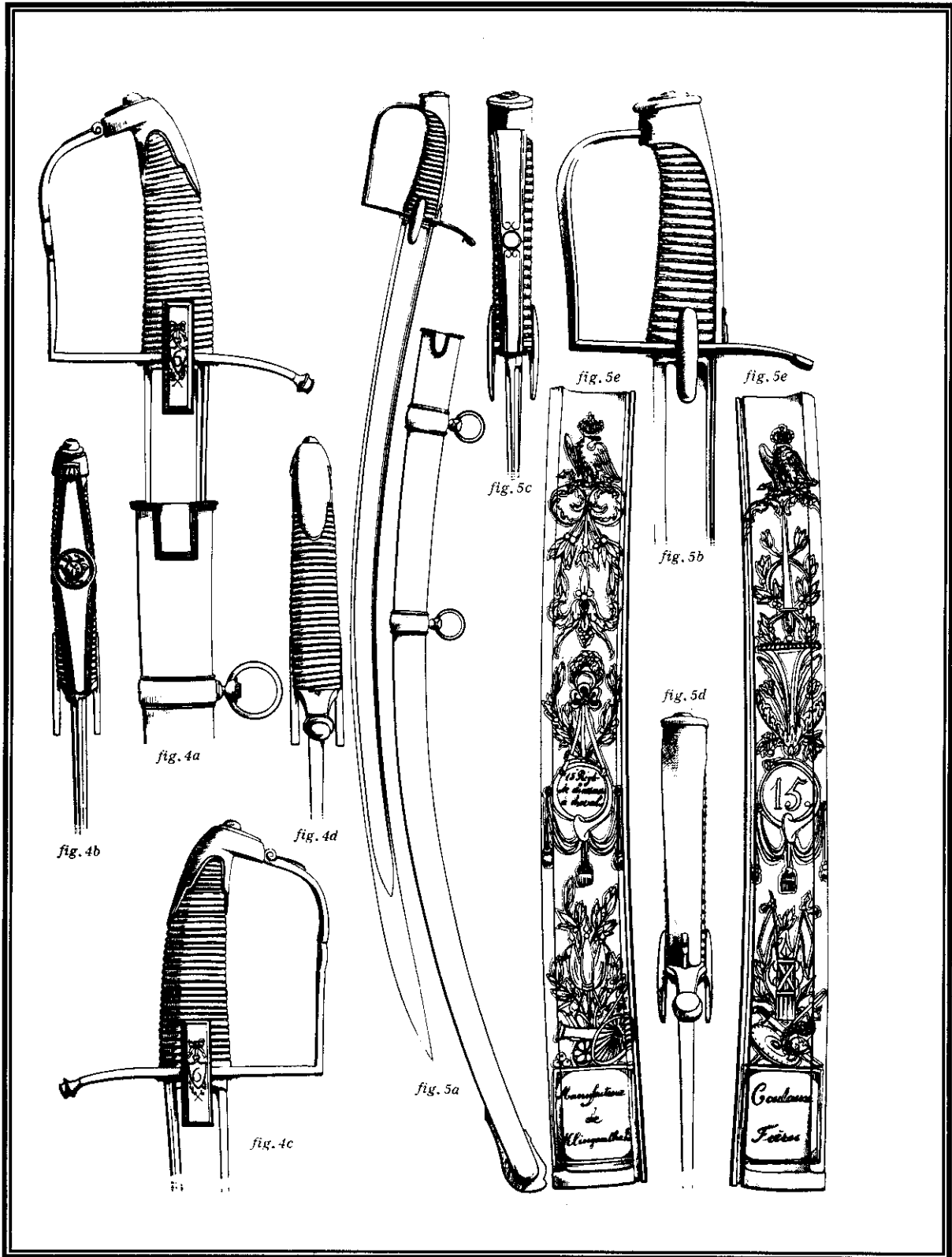
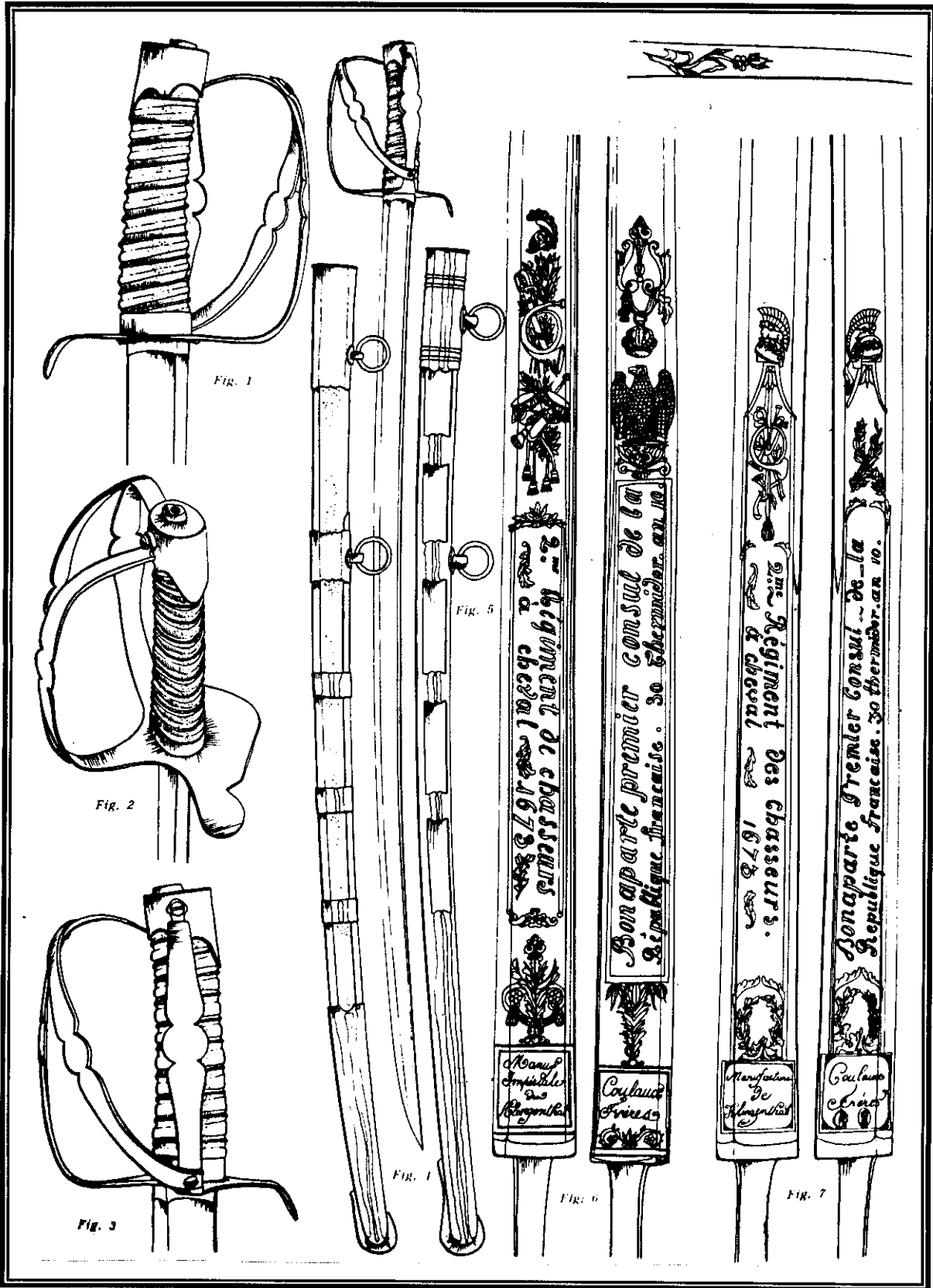


Figure 4. Officer's sabre of the 6<sup>th</sup> Chasseurs à Cheval Regiment.  
Figure 5. Officer's sabre of the 10<sup>th</sup> Chasseurs à Cheval Regiment.



Figures 1-4, 7. Sabre of an officer of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chasseurs à Cheval, epoch of the Consulate (No. D153, Musée de l'armée).

Figure 5-6. Ibid., epoch of the Empire (No. 5892, Musée de l'armée).

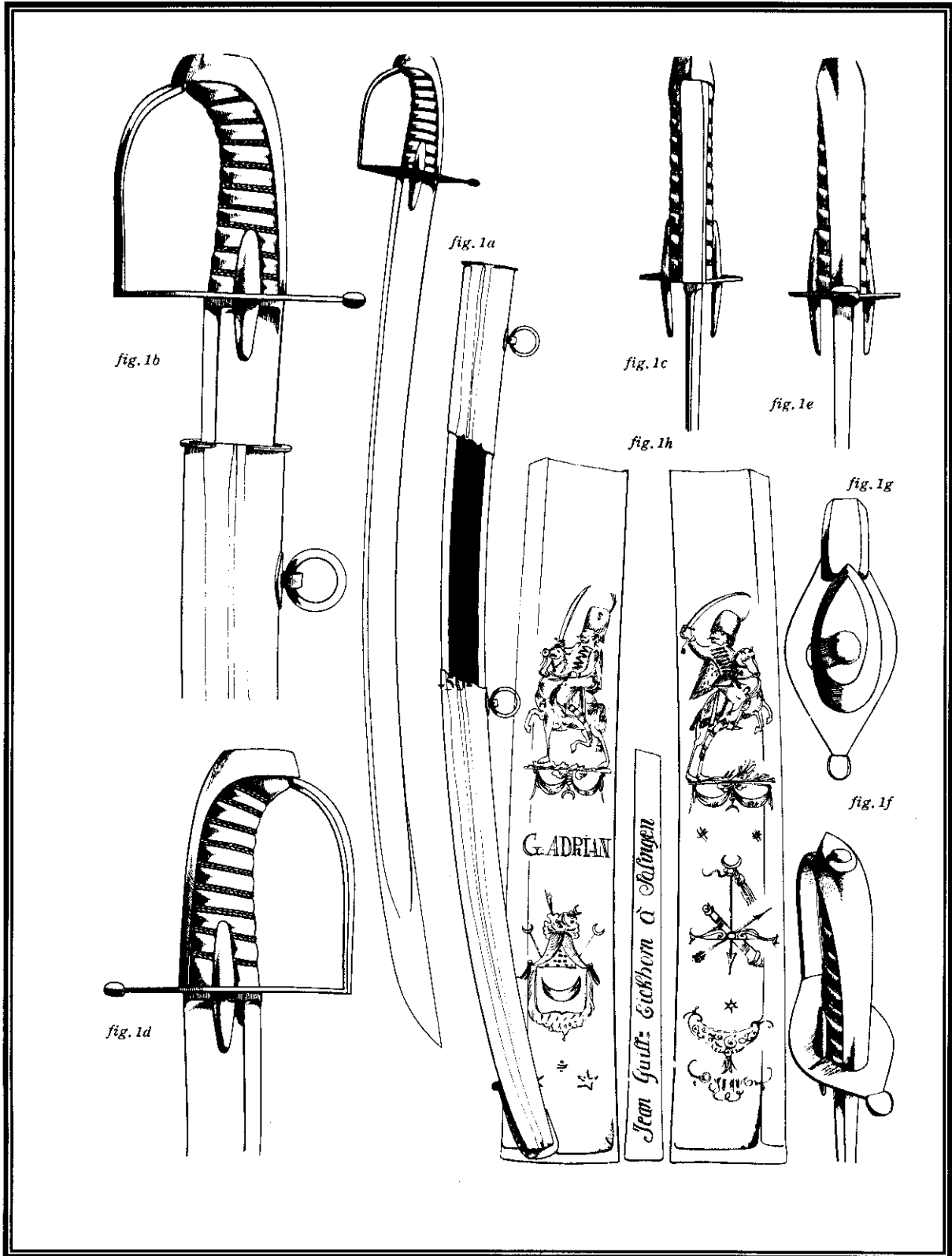


Figure 1. Sabre "à la Allemande" of the 20<sup>th</sup> Chasseurs à Cheval Regiment (Musée de l'armée).



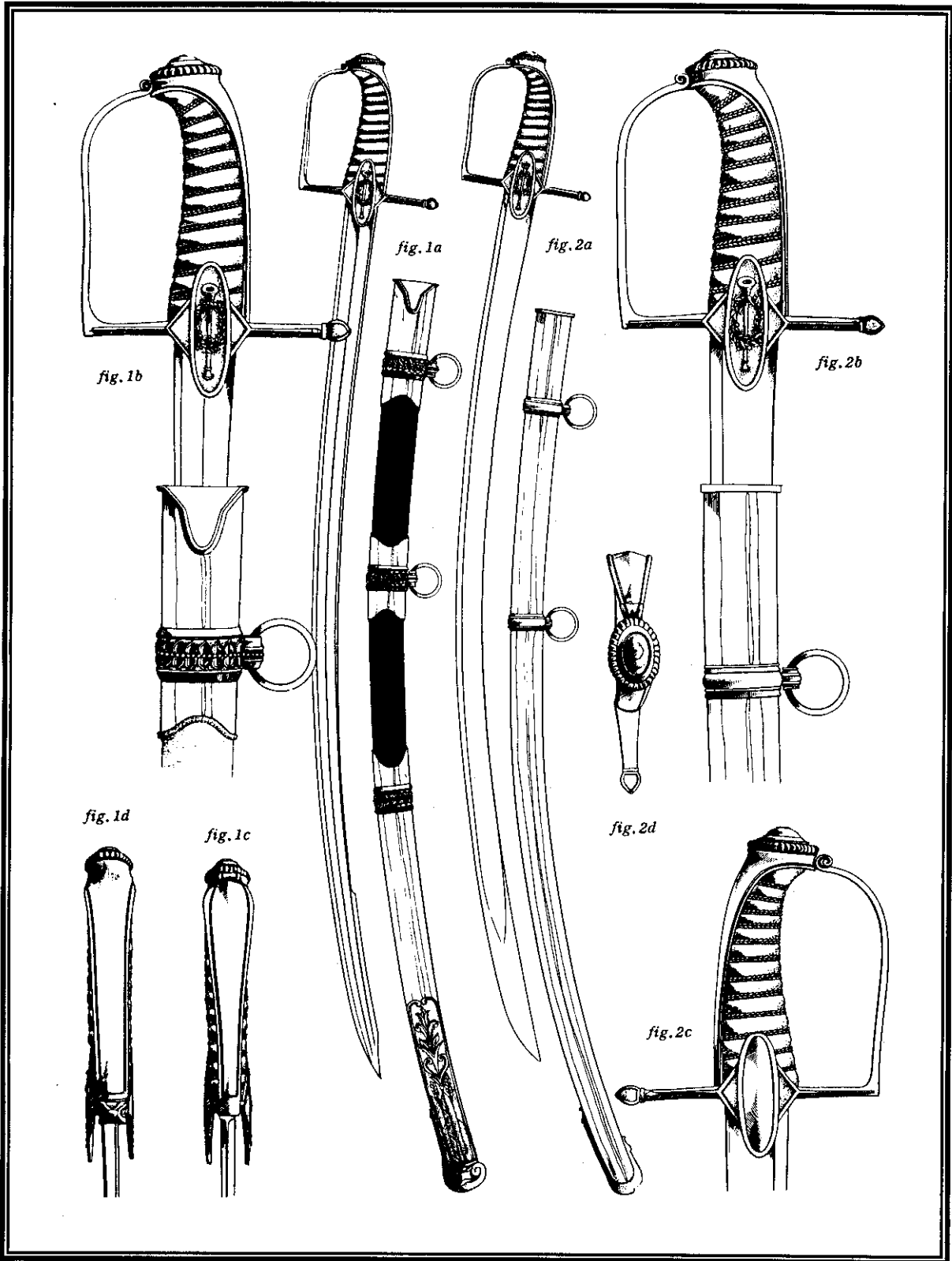
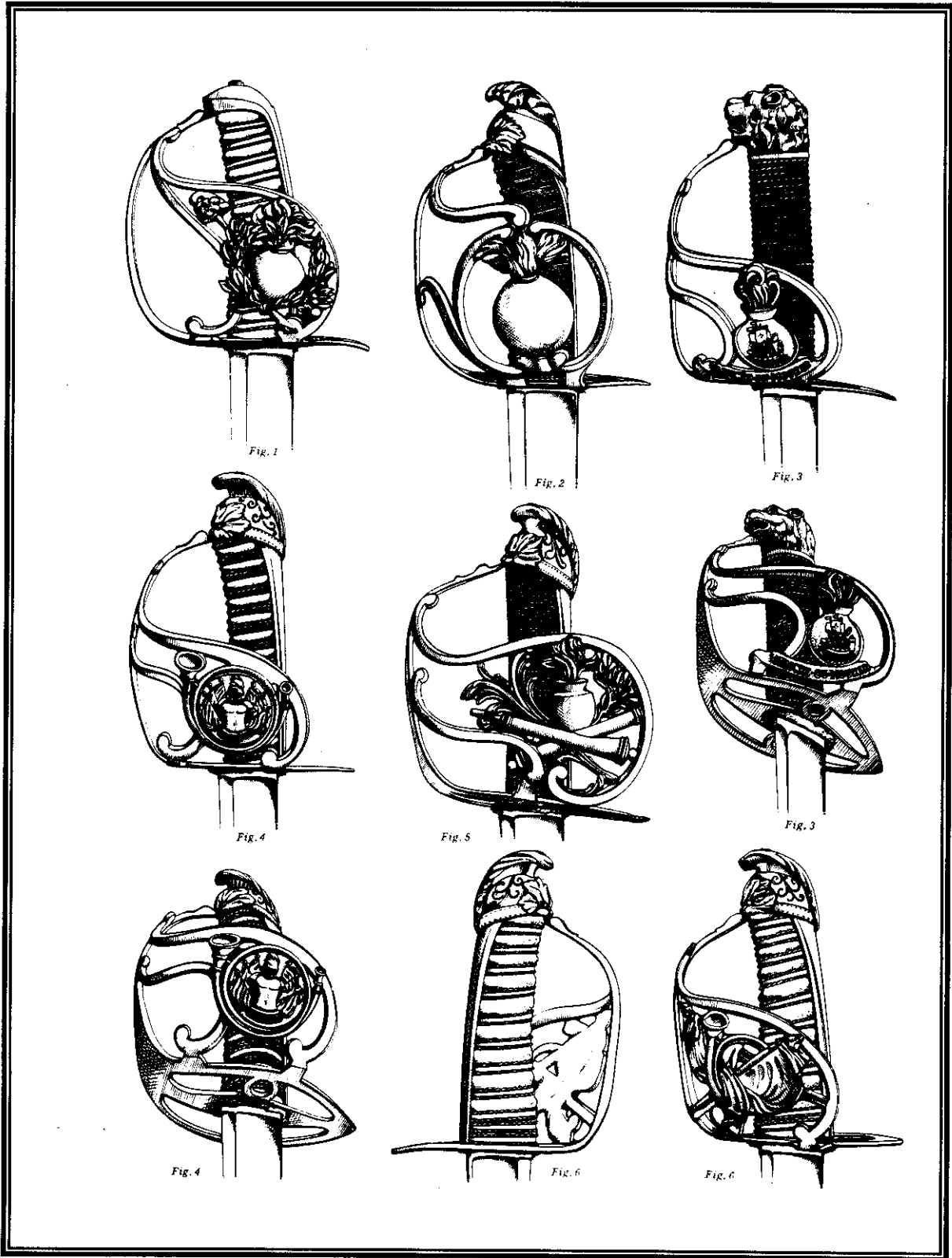


Figure 1. Sabre of the trumpeter-major of the hussars (Coll. private, Saumur).  
Figure 2. Another pattern of the scabbard for the same sabre (Coll. Glain).



Sabres "petit Montmorency" of the Revolutionary epoch, 1792-1798.

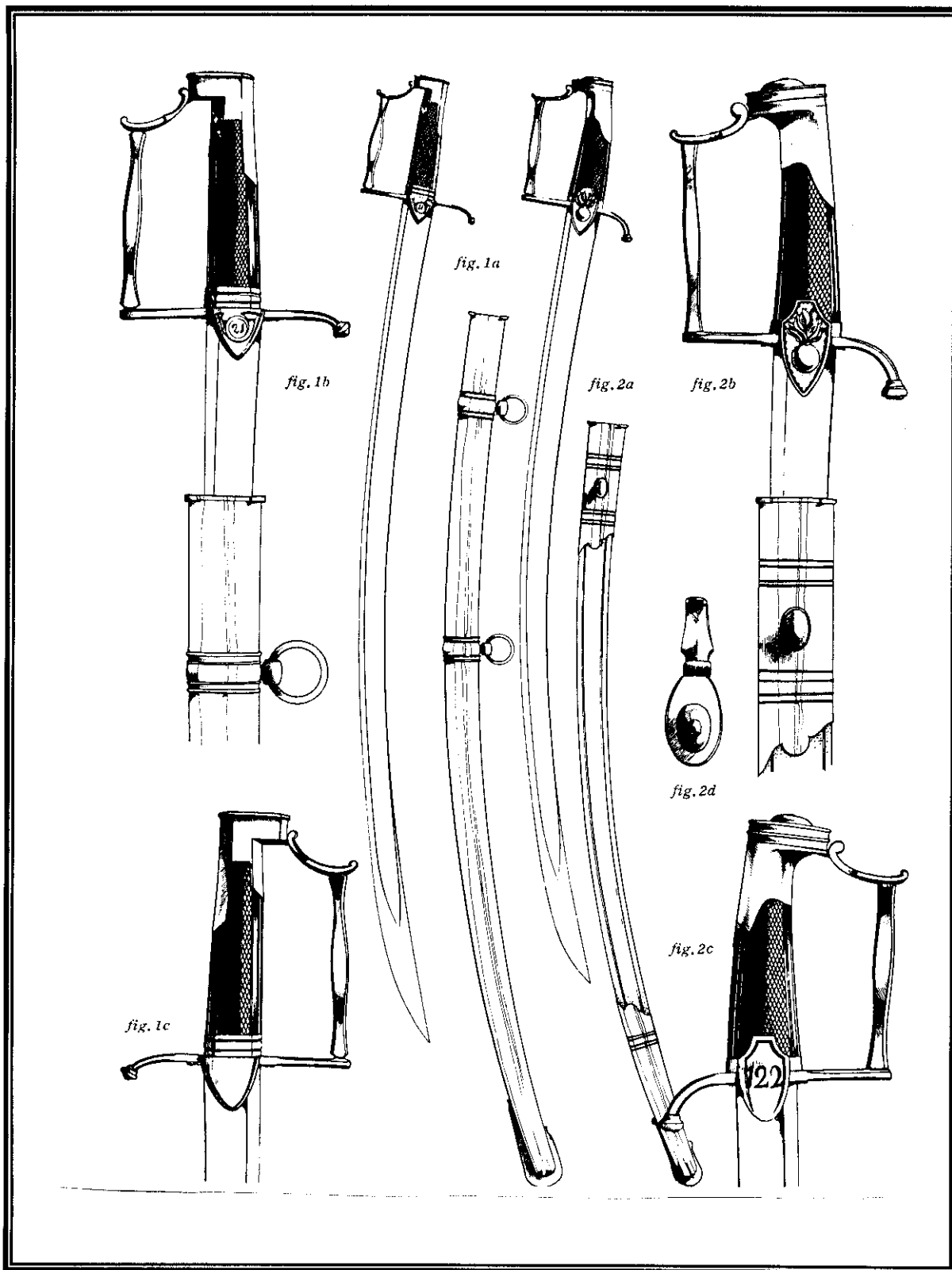


Figure 1. Sabre of the carabinier officer, the 21<sup>st</sup> Light demi-brigade (Coll. Dr. Hutin).

Figure 2. Sabre of the grenadier officer, the 122<sup>nd</sup> Line demi-brigade (Musée de l'armée).

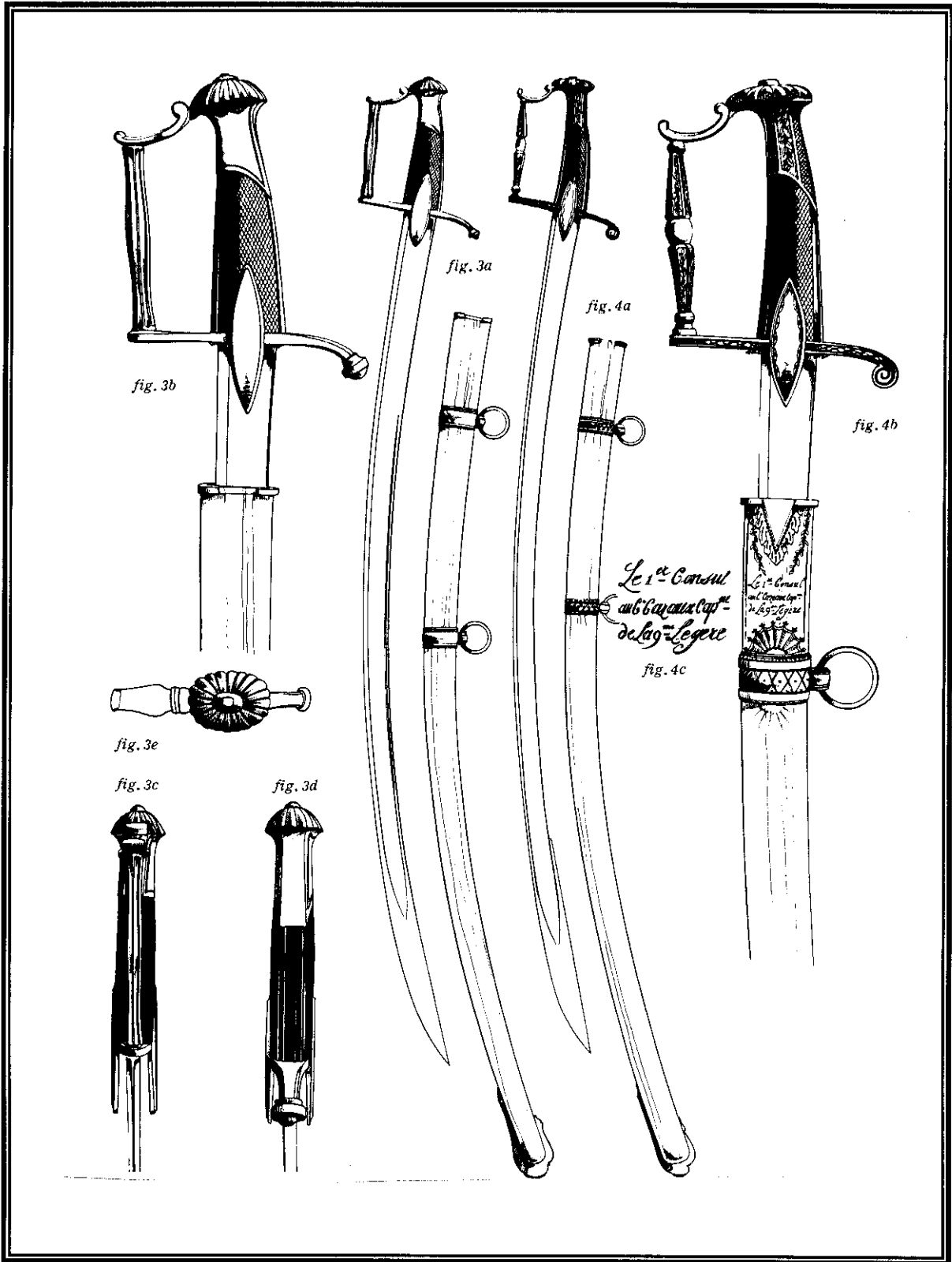


Figure 3. Sabre of the infantry officer (Coll. Gerdinge).

Figure 4. Sabre of the officer of the 9<sup>th</sup> Light demi-brigade (Musée de l'armée).

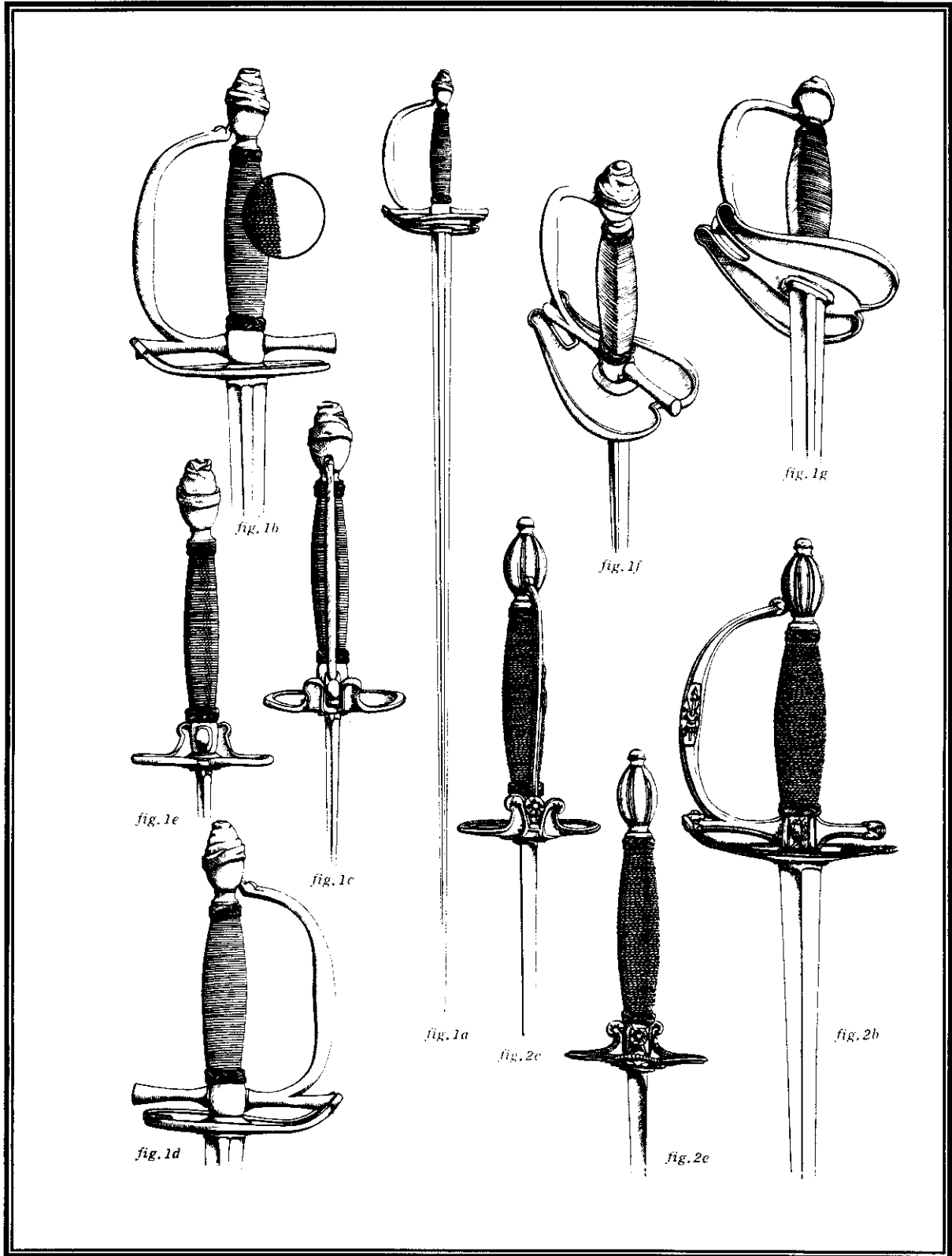
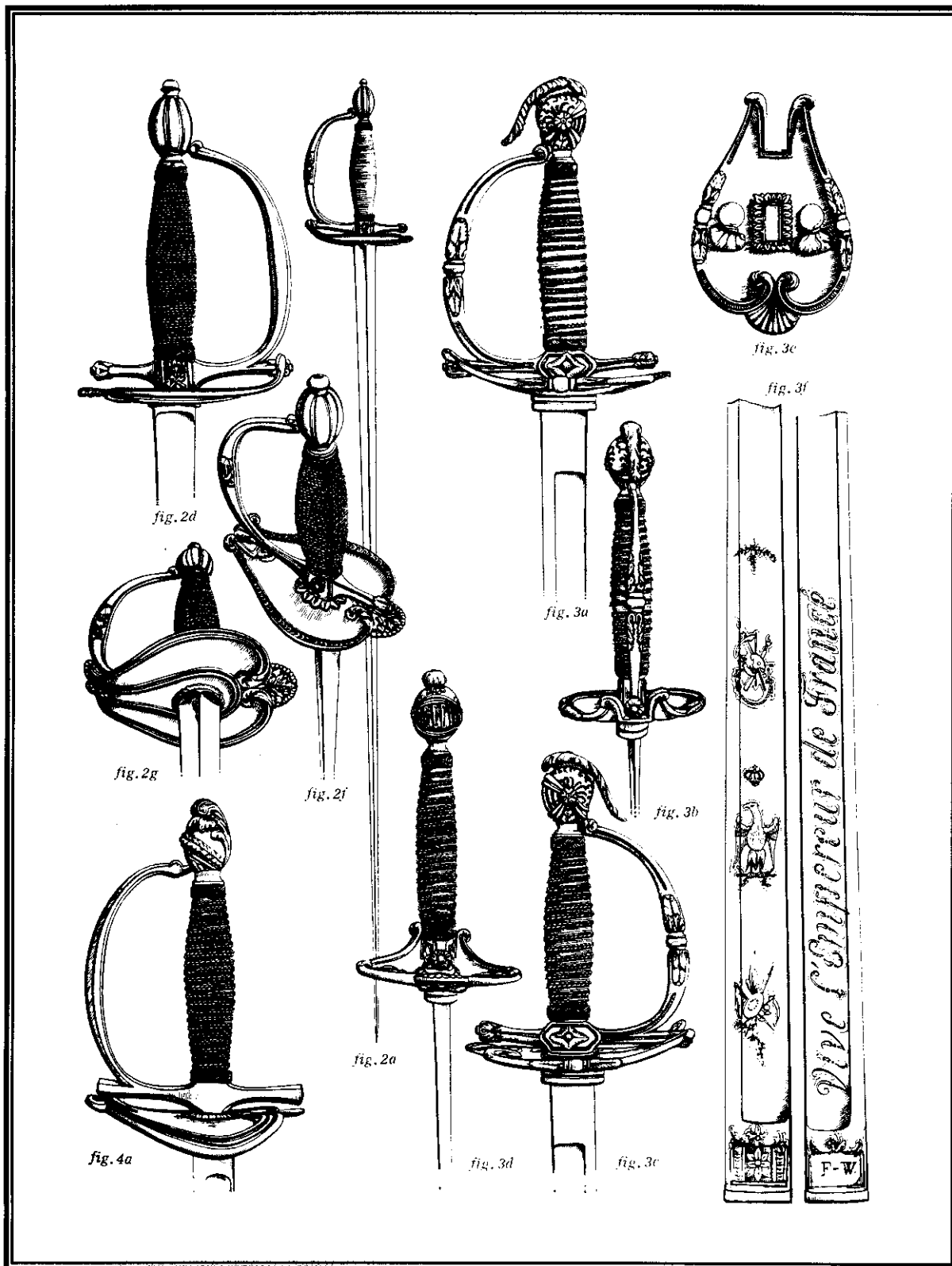
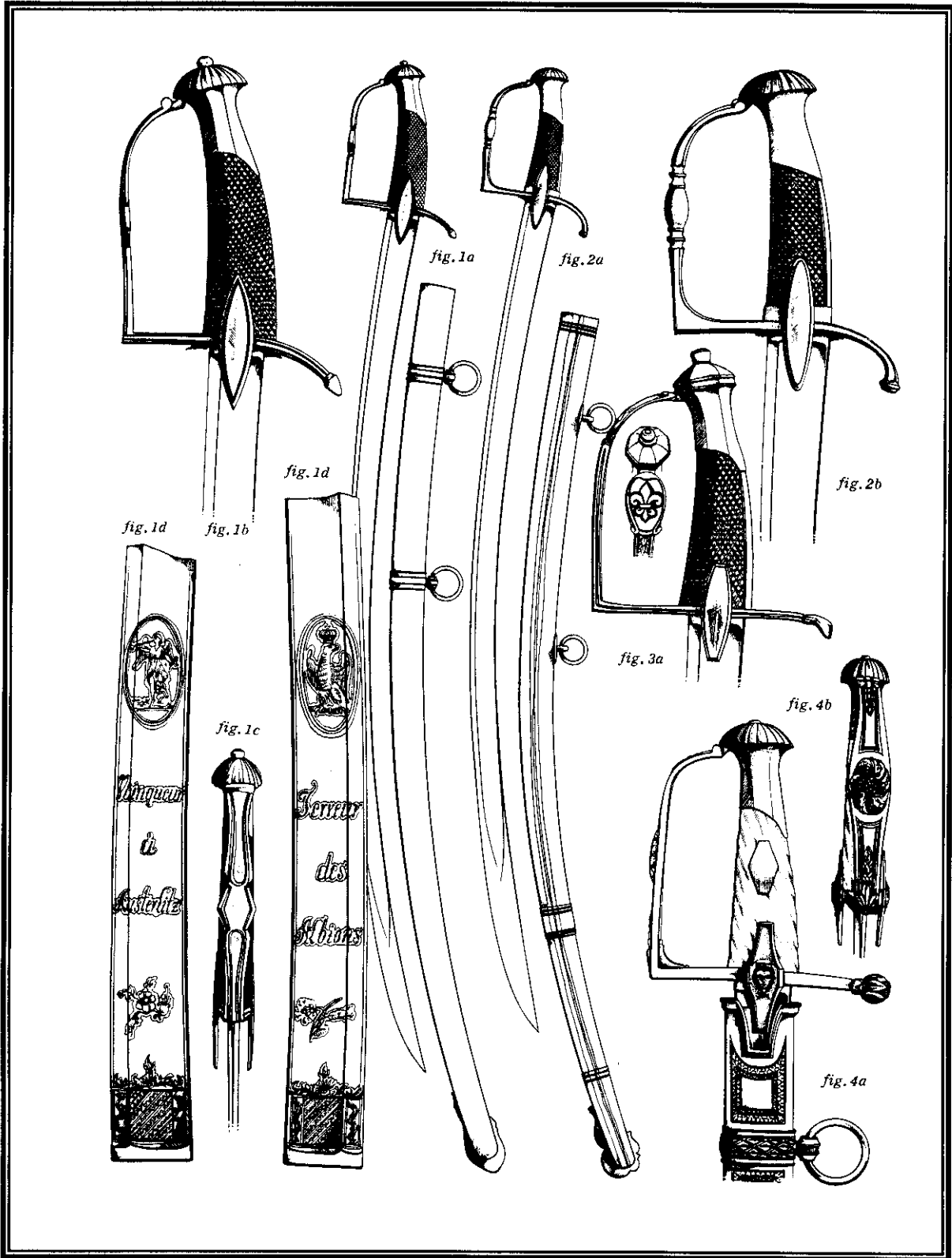


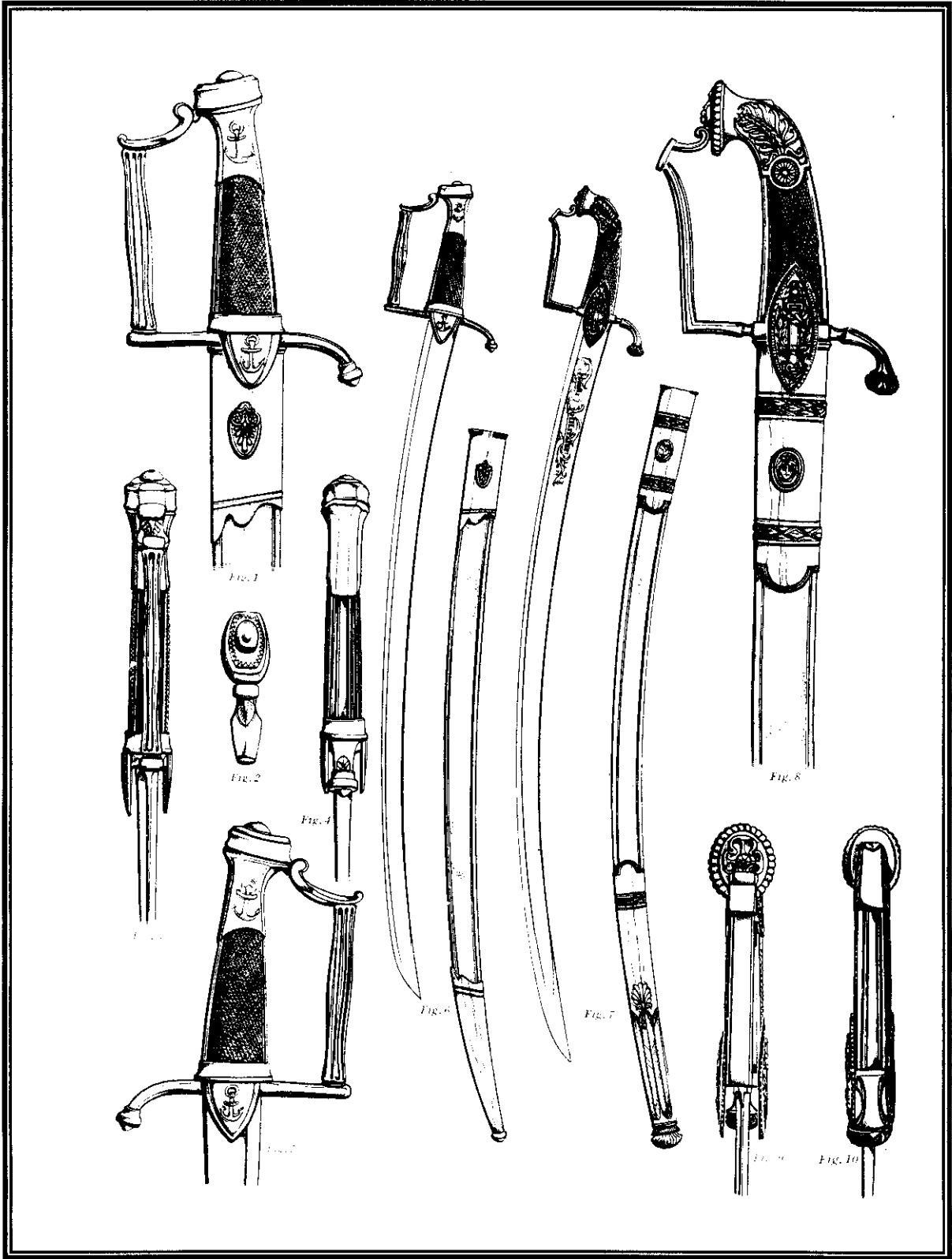
Figure 1. Infantry officer épée, 1792-1795 (Coll. M. Pétard).  
Figure 2. Épée on the epoch of Directory.



Figures 2-3. Infantry officers' épées on the epoch of Empire.  
Figure 4. Infantry officer épée, epoch of the Consulate.

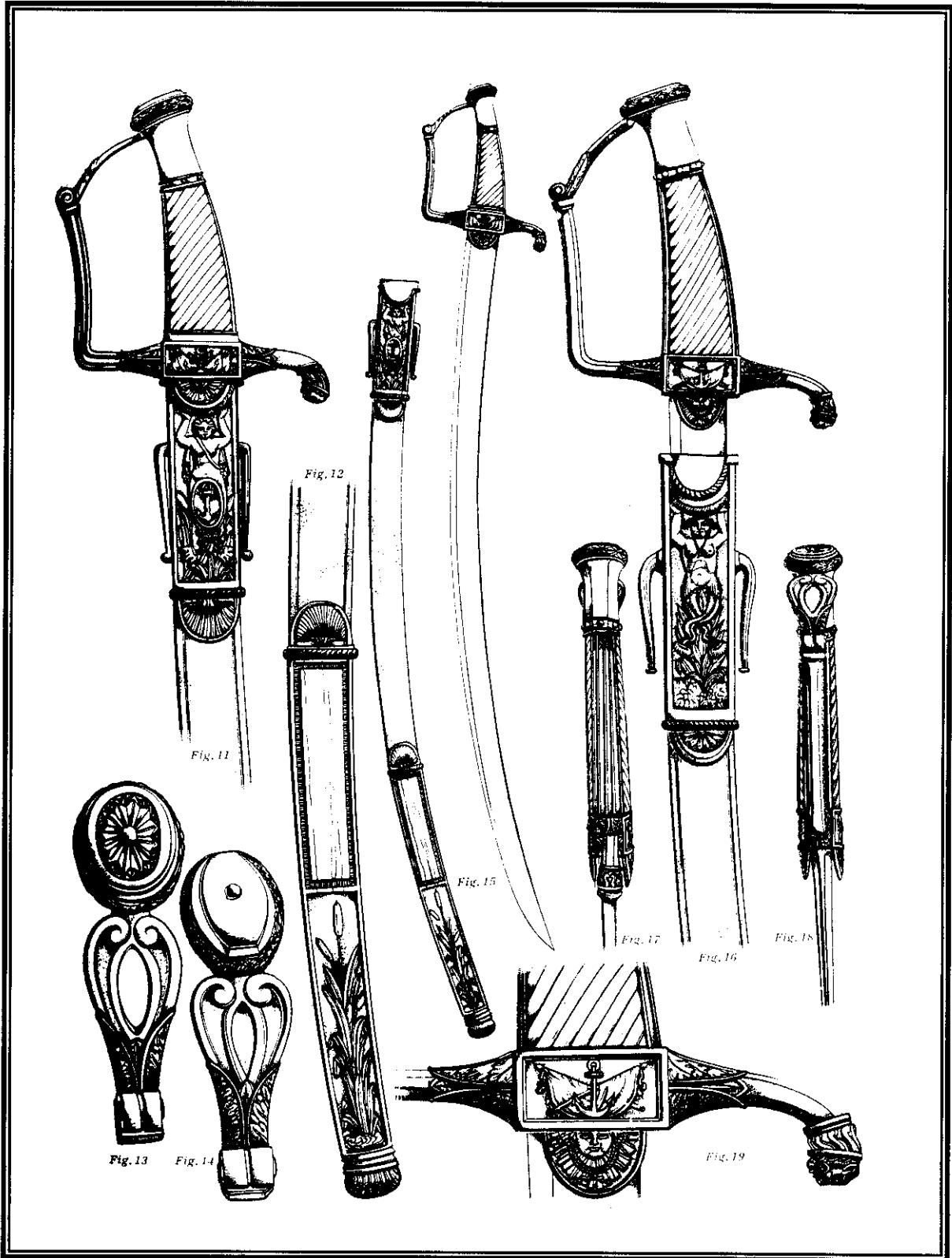


Figures 1-2. Sabres of the infantry officers, epoch of the Empire.  
Figures 3-4. Officers' sabres, epoch of the First Restoration.

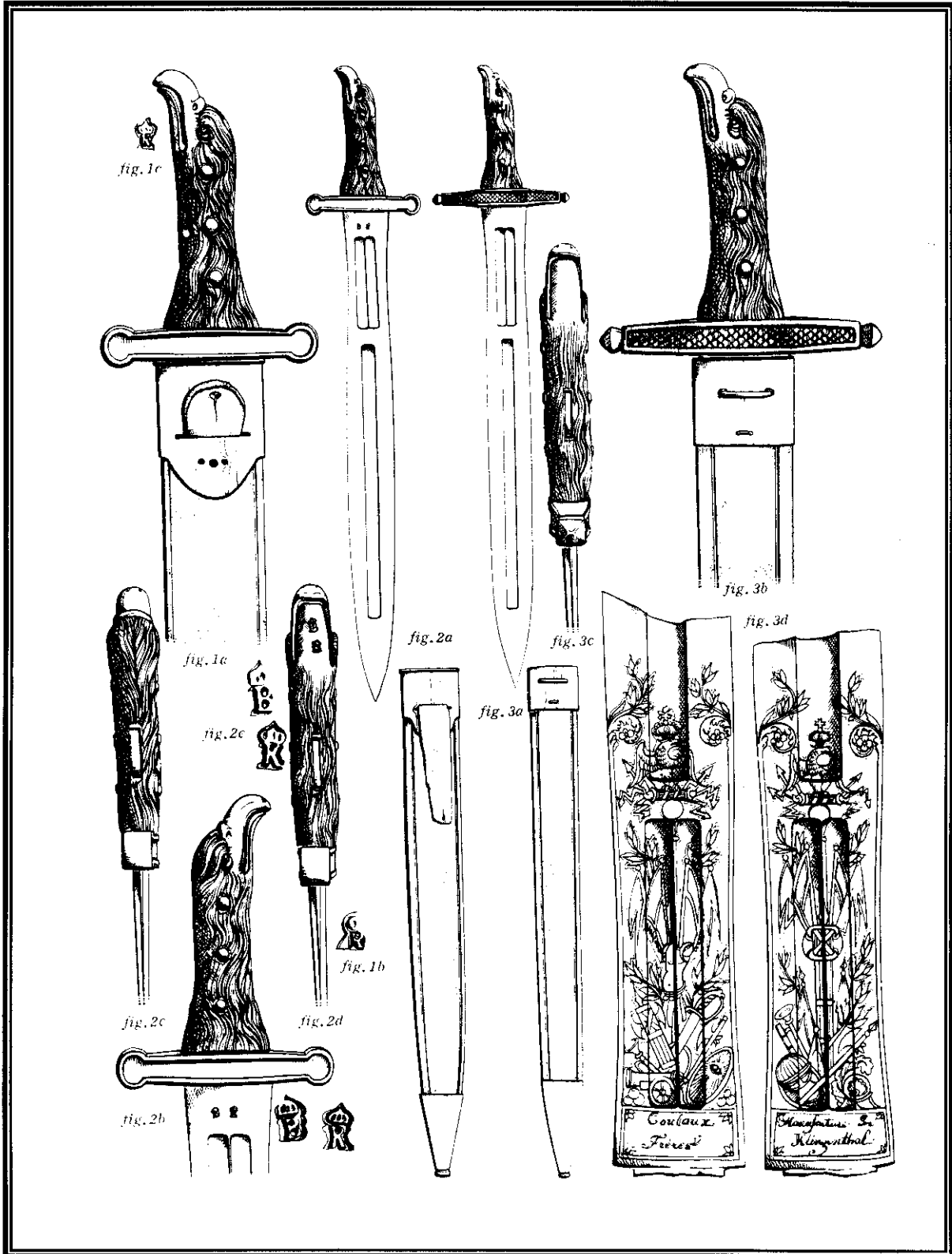


Figures 1-10. Sabres of the officers des Marines, as directed in the Prairial An XII (Musée de l'armée).

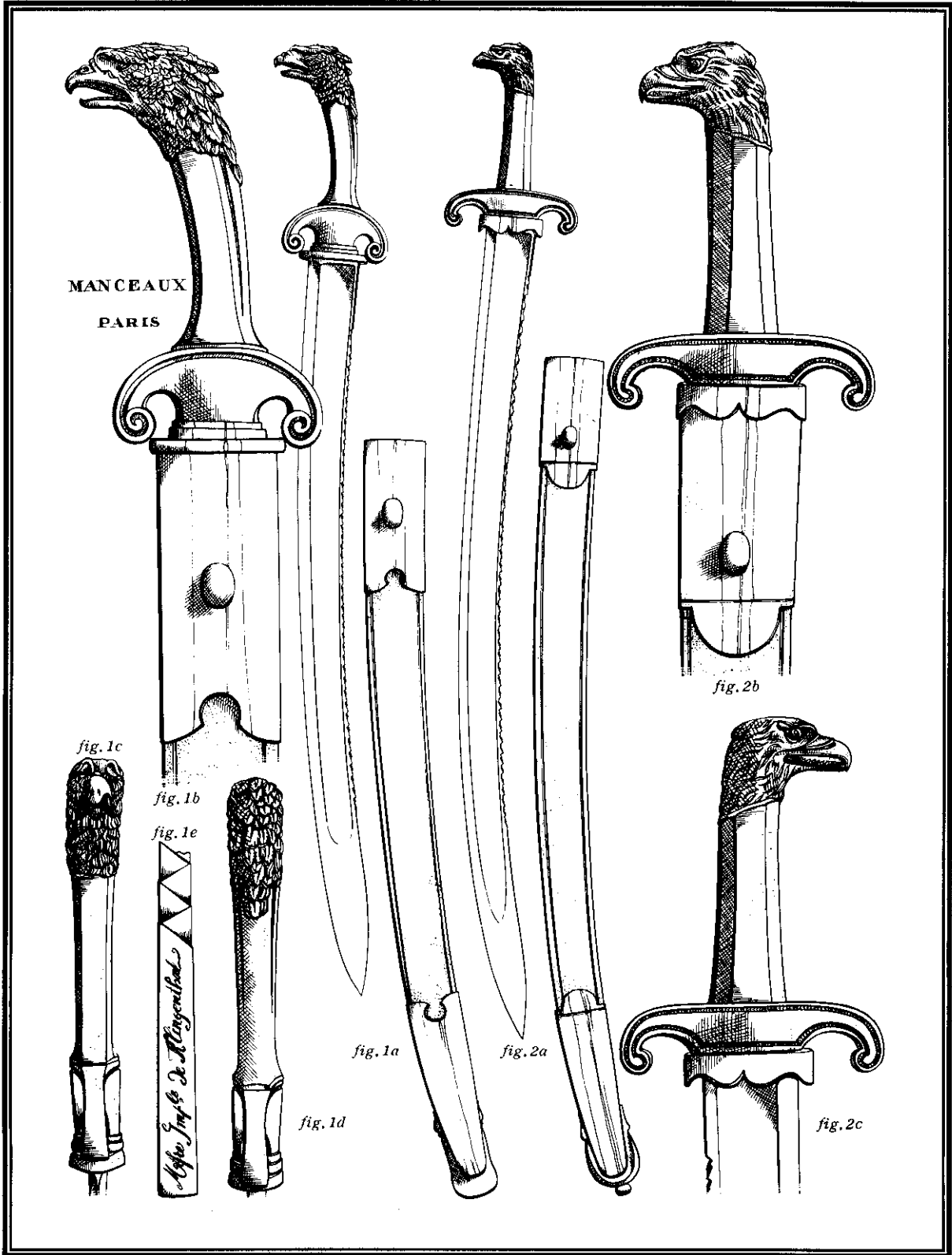




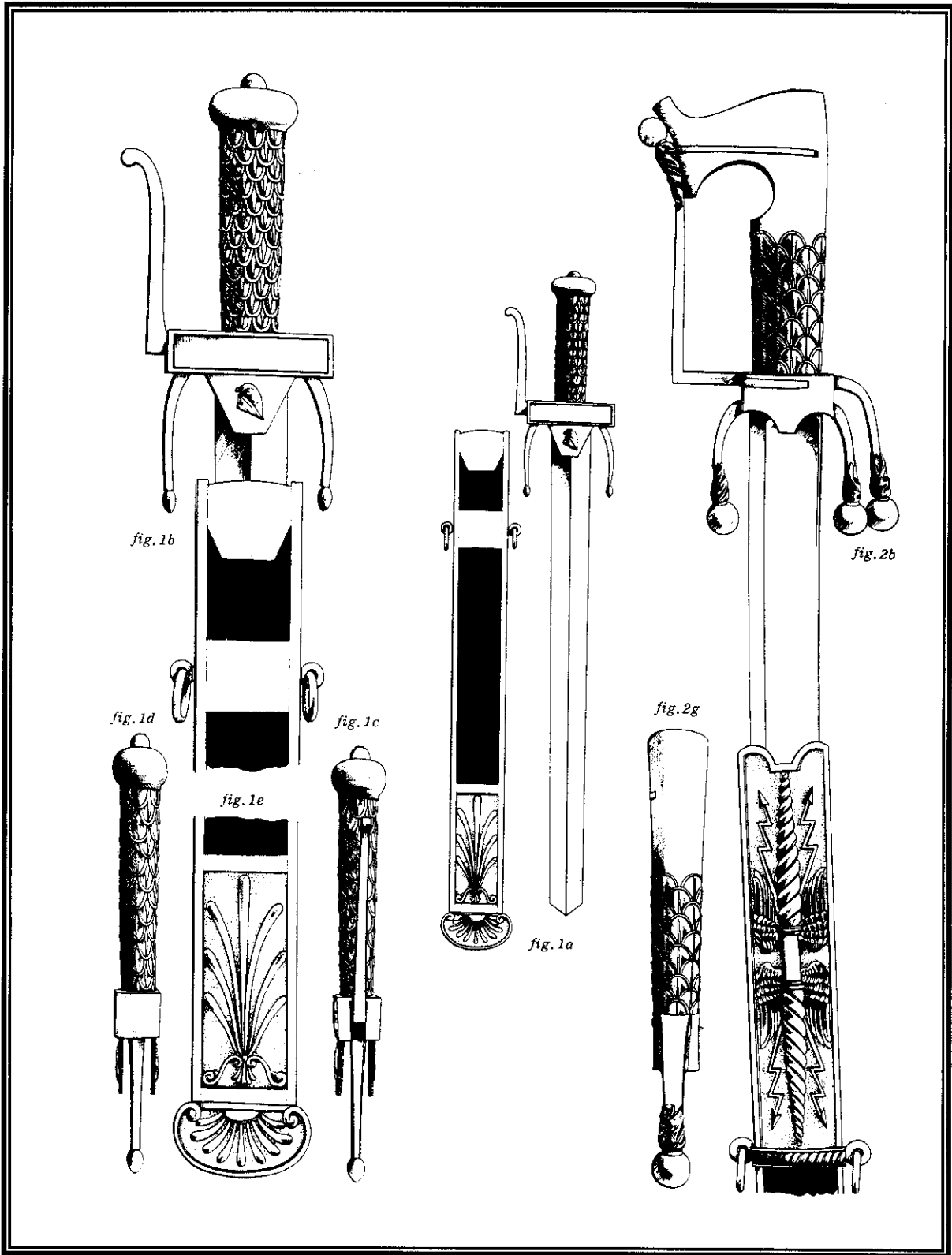
Figures 11-19. Sabre of the officers des Marines, (No. 5907, Musée de l'armée).



Briquet of artillery, 1790 (Musée de l'armée, Coll. Raoul & Jean Brunon).



Figures 1,2. Sabres of the sappers, epoch of the Consulate and Empire, 1802-1815  
(Musée de l'armée).



Special swords designed for the students of l'Ecole de Mars, 1794  
(Musée de l'armée, Coll. Raoul & Jean Brunon).

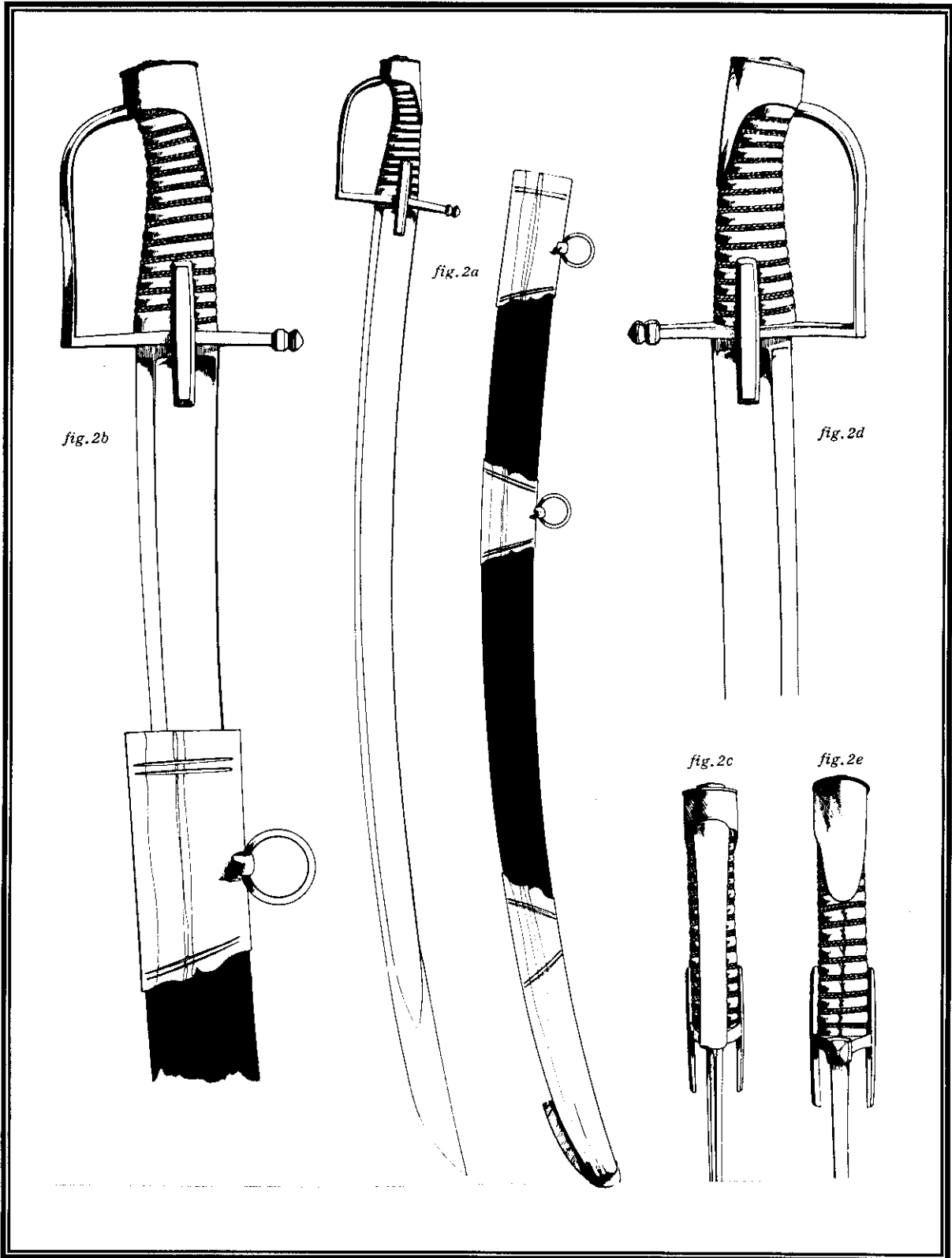


Figure 2. Sabre "à laTurc" of the 1776 pattern, modified An IV and carried by the Dromadaires Regiment in Egypt, 1799-1801 (Coll. Raoul & Jean Brunon).

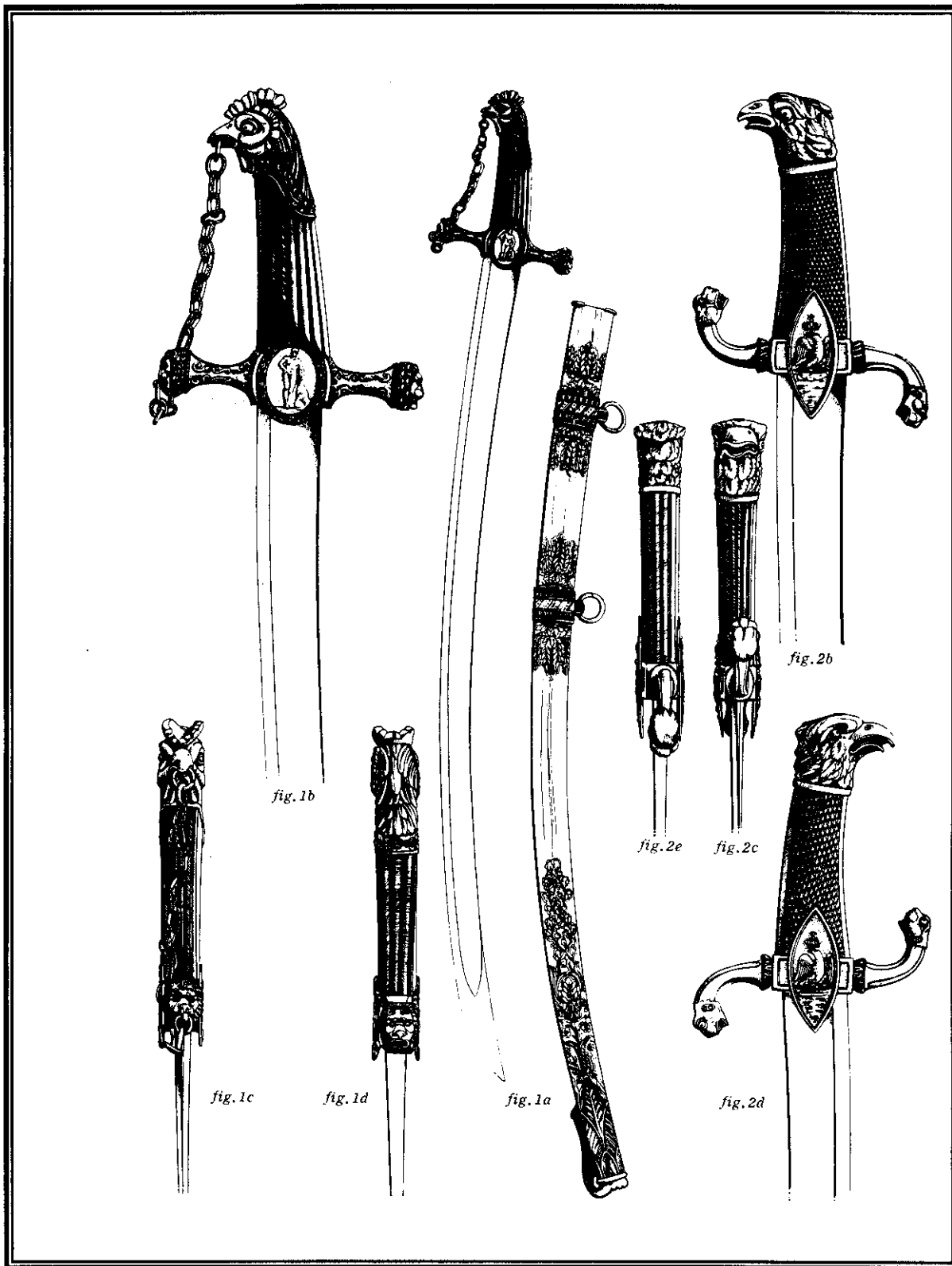
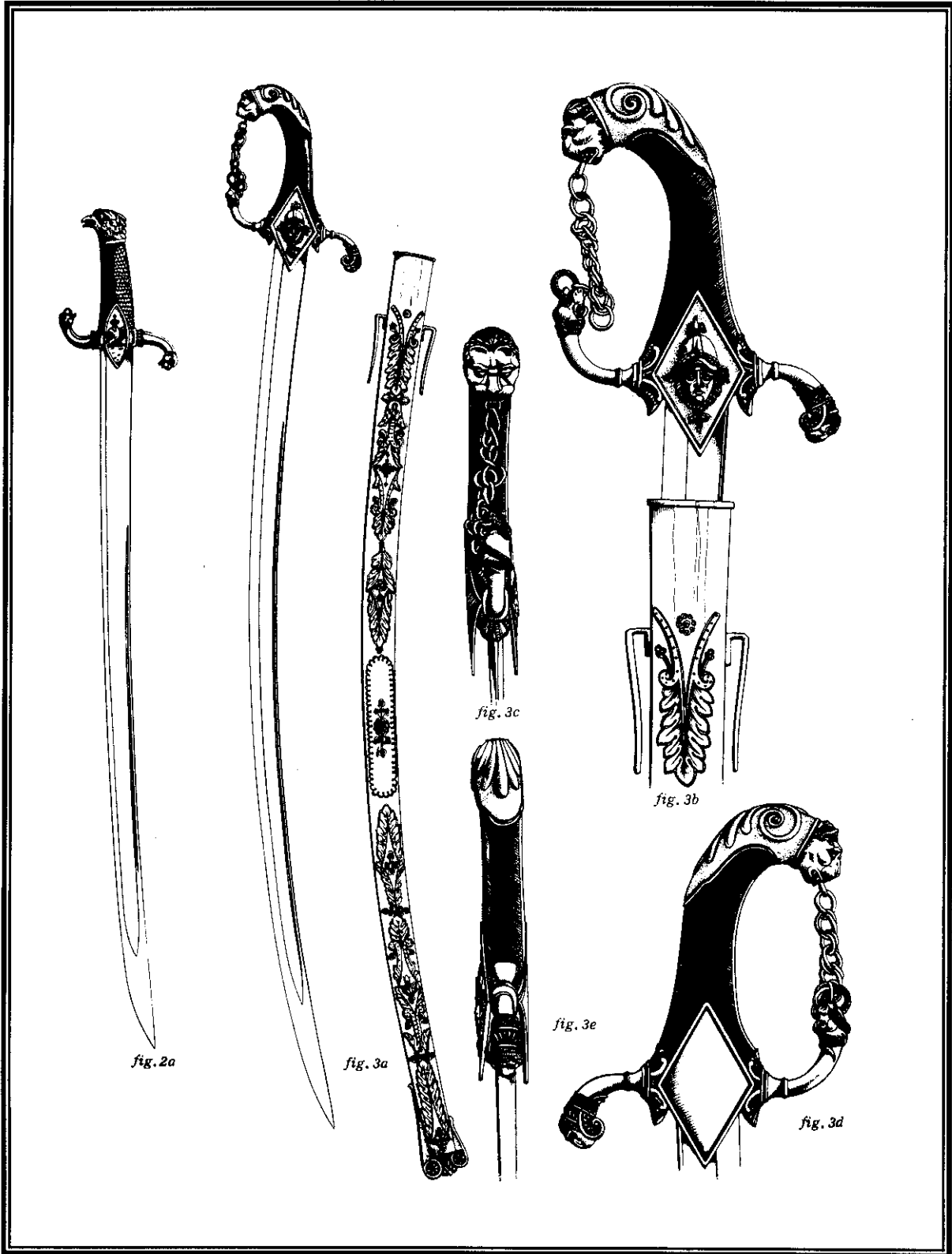


Figure 1. Sabre of the Tambour-major, epoch of Consulate.

Figure 2. Sabre of the Tambour-major, epoch of Empire (Musée de l'Empéri).



Figures 2-3. Sabres of the Tambour-major, epoch of Empire (Musée de l'Empéri).

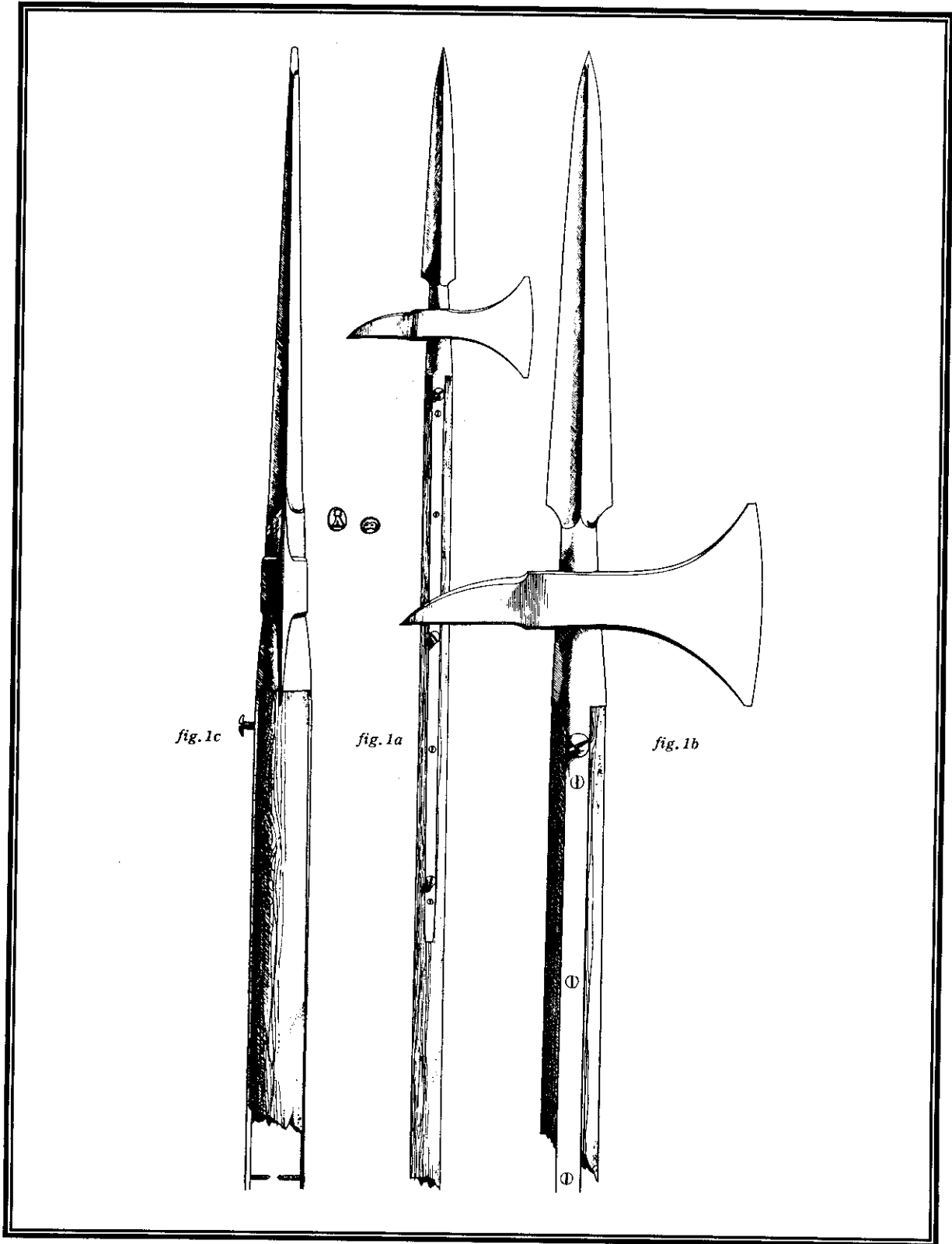


Figure 1. Porte-aigle halberd, issued by circular of the War Ministry on 18 September 1809.  
(Musée de l'armée)