



Acta Periodica Duellatorum

E-ISSN: 2064-0404

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IV

Acta Periodica Duellatorum, vol. 4, núm. 2, 2016, pp. 31-45

Universität Bern

Bern, Suiza

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A Look Behind the Scenes: Danish Renaissance Martial Arts during the Reign of Christian IV

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Abstract

From the 4th – 7th of July 2016, the annual International Medieval Congress was held in Leeds, England. Among the many different sessions two specifically addressed historical European martial arts. The first session discussed and commented upon modern practices and interpretations of historical European martial arts, each paper being based on good practice and the proper criteria for academic research. The second session, in which this paper was presented, went more “behind the scenes”, discussing the importance of thorough analysis of the historical context which remains essential to forming a foundation for solid hypotheses and interpretations.

This article discusses and sheds light upon Danish historical martial art during the reign of the Danish King Christian IV (r.1588 to 1648). At this point in time Europe consisted of many small principalities in addition to a few larger states and kingdoms. Thoughts and ideas could spread as quickly as ripples in water but also be bound by political and religious alliances or enmities, plague, famine and not to mention the role also played by topographical and cultural differences. Thus, at times, vast cultural differences could be seen from region to region.

To this should be added a wide range of social factors, such as the role of relationships and mentalities, and the obeying of unspoken norms and codes which can also affect modern researchers’ interpretations of what is shown or described. Therefore, the aim of this article is to provide a series of “behind the scenes” examples which all have the potential to affect hypotheses, interpretations, and overall understandings of the context of historical European martial arts.

Keywords – Denmark; Soro Academy; Christian IV; Historical European Martial Arts; Martial arts; History; Renaissance;

I. INTRODUCTION

In the sixteenth century, the European elites witnessed a change in the dissemination of power across society. The modern state began to take shape, and religious reformations were carried out in several places across Europe. In this changing society, the Danish King Christian IV (ruled 1588-1648) did his best to appear as a modern European Renaissance prince. He built the magnificent buildings, led wars against powerful enemies, and cultivated courtly culture with all that this entailed.

It is said that the European Renaissance meant the rebirth of humanity. While during the Middle Ages one sought God's grace through prayer and sacrifice, in the Renaissance one also sought God's salvation through ennobling the soul. Virtue through education was one such way to ennoble the soul; knowledge of science, art, and culture was immensely important. It was not uncommon for European Renaissance princes to make great efforts in strengthening and developing science and art in their respective areas of Europe. This often included inviting foreign scientists, artists, and experts to their courts. These initiatives should be seen as political and cultural advertisements for the prince and his court which also consolidated the prince's power in a changing society.

I.1. The Noble Art of Fencing

In 1528 the famous Renaissance author and nobleman Baldassarre Castiglione wrote the book *Il Libro del Cortegiano* (*The Book of the Courtier*), in which is portrayed the ideal Renaissance nobleman and his behaviour at court. Castiglione describes fencing (the use of arms) as perhaps the most important skill by which to judge a nobleman; he viewed it as being without equal in regards to the formation of one's character. Fencing reinforced the body and soul, and with such skills and knowledge, a nobleman could learn to move properly, think properly and consequently also be able to judge fairly.¹

It was therefore no wonder that rapier fencing, which was based on the understanding of mechanics, geometry, and physics grew in popularity throughout Europe. The rapier itself was a thin, sleek civilian weapon (sword) of no great military significance, but whose symbolic value and prestige rose in contrast to the sword's waning function as a weapon of war.

In regard to Denmark, related to the issue of cultural and political advertising, it was therefore also of utmost importance that the King's fencing masters were among the most sought after and respected in Europe.

I.2. King Christian IV and Salvator Fabris

The oldest preserved Danish fencing manual (defined here as written in Denmark) is from 1601 and authored by the Italian fencing master Salvator Fabris Padavano (1544-1617),

¹ Castiglione, "The Book of the Courtier", p.25.

Cavalliero part Hordine delli Seti Corri (Knight of the Order of Seven Hearts). Until 1598, the fencing master had worked and lived in Padua where he taught noblemen and princes who travelled to the city as part of their educational journey. In 1598 he followed one of his princely pupils, Duke Johan Friedrich of Gottorp, to the Duchy of Schleswig-Holstein, which at the time was under Danish supremacy. The fencing master stayed at the Duke's court for three years, but in 1601 he left Schleswig-Holstein for the far more vibrant and pompous royal court in Copenhagen. As a parting gift to the Duke, Salvator Fabris presented a three-volume fencing manual, *Scientia a pratica dell'arme*,² the first fencing manual written in the kingdom of Denmark.³

Salvator Fabris now became King Christian IV's personal fencing teacher. In 1605, the fencing master presented and dedicated a new fencing manual in two volumes to the Danish king. It was printed in Copenhagen in 1606. That same year Salvator Fabris asked Christian for permission to return to Padua, as his health was failing. The visit to Padua was only meant to be temporary, and Salvator Fabris was expected to return to Copenhagen and the Danish royal court. However, when Salvator Fabris reached Padua, he opened a new fencing school and stayed; it is doubtful whether the fencing master ever had intentions of returning to Denmark. He died in Padua in 1617.⁴

The two fencing manuals, which were presented respectively to Duke Johann Friedrich of the Duchy of Schleswig-Holstein and King Christian IV were given to the princes late in the fencing master's employment at the two courts. It is interesting to ask what were the overall purposes of such texts? It seems unlikely that these two manuals represent a kind of sales catalogue, as the fencing master had already obtained secure employment at the respective courts. If the manuals are to be viewed as part of the political and cultural advertisement for the king and his court, through the accumulation of knowledge, art and culture the European princes greatly sought, a relevant question would also be whether the knowledge the books contain are "clean" and representative of Italian fencing with all the cultural quirks, purposes, traditions, concepts of honour and unwritten rules, or whether they also to some extent represent cultural trends and styles that were prevalent at the royal Danish court? The answer is not straightforward and the question shall merely be presented here as a theoretical example. However, such questions are of utmost relevance to how the manuals must be interpreted and understood.⁵

² Copenhagen, Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Gl. Kgl. Sml. 1864 4°

³ Migliorato, "Den italienske fægtemester", p. 46.

⁴ Migliorato, "Den italienske fægtemester", p. 54.

⁵ For a discussion on such see: Jaquet, Sorenson & Cognot, *Historical European Martial Art*, a crossroad between academic research, martial heritage, re-creation and martial sport practices, in *Acta Periodica Duellatorum*, Budapest 2015, pp. 12-14.

Although Salvator Fabris ended up as Christian's personal fencing master, he also taught the Danish princes, and is also likely to have instructed the upper Danish nobility when they attended court. The fencing master and his teachings were in all probability not open to anyone except a select few. A modern nobleman's educational journey was long and started in the early years of his life. He had to be taught religion, politics, languages, science, mathematics and noble pursuits, which among others included fencing, dancing, art and music. Therefore, to ensure the quality of a proper education, Christian IV made plans to found a royal academy where the realm's young noblemen could be taught.

II. SORO ACADEMY

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Danish nobility slowly evolved from their old position as knightly protectors of the realm to being landowners and officials. Thus, a well-educated nobility became a valuable and indispensable asset in the Danish apparatus of state. Nevertheless, King Christian IV expressed concern regarding the quality of the young noblemen's education and learning processes, as until then these had been determined by their parents. Therefore, in 1623, a noble academy was founded with the aim of providing good quality education for the young noblemen and preparing them for a future as state officials. The king placed a particular emphasis on a proper Protestant upbringing and education. The teaching program also included politics, mathematics, language skills, good manners and noble exercises, including fencing. Although it is evident in letters from the king to the Danish Council that the king, first and foremost, emphasized the role of the classes as a preparation for the noblemen's careers as state officials, one can also see Christian IV's personal passion for the old knightly virtues and exercises.⁶

The relationship between the council and the king can at this time be characterized as a long power struggle. Therefore, the king was also aware that several nobles were probably reluctant to enrol their children at the academy. In light of this the king enforced the rule that if a nobleman, in his youth, had not studied at Soro Academy, then he would not be granted the role of an official in the Danish state.⁷ The ultimatum was harsh, but must be seen as a quality assurance of the king's future officials. It was generally known that the popular educational travels were not in themselves a guarantee of good education and formation of character. On the contrary, we know of several examples where the young noblemen spent their time drinking, gambling, and fornicating rather than studying.

It varied how old the young noblemen were when they began their studies at the academy. The youngest were fourteen or fifteen years old, most were between sixteen and nineteen

⁶ Kancelliets brevbøger (1623), p. 520-523.

⁷ Kancelliets brevbøger (1623), p. 521.

years of age, and a few were between twenty and twenty-one years old. The average study time was about two years.⁸

II.1. Teachers at Soro Academy

King Christian IV sought out the very best teachers to teach at his new academy. In order to attract such highly sought after teachers there was a need for fine accommodation at the academy. In 1622, the king decided to build a house at the future academy grounds. It was constructed of brick, half-timbered and was of top quality. The house was built for those people “who come hither to teach our youth in the noble exercises”.⁹

Most of the academy’s teachers came from outside of Denmark. This applied to both professors and fencing masters. However, Christian IV harboured a serious mistrust of the many foreign teachers who could potentially lure the young noblemen into trouble, especially concerning their religious and political outlooks. The king thus wrote to Dr. Hans Reisener at Sorø Academy:

The king has learned that many, both in the King’s own kingdom and in foreign nations, in secret covet our youth in order to seduce it with false beliefs, and thereby threaten the future of our religion and state. As soon as possible, the king hereby demands supervision of the teachers at the Royal Academy Soro, so they do not seduce our youth and secretly turn them towards things that are contrary to the sacred biblical writings and our religion.¹⁰

It was not only the foreign teachers who posed a danger to the young noblemen. The teachers often brought with them an entourage to the academy which included their private household and family. Therefore, the king made it clear, that only the academy teachers were allowed to enter the academy grounds, whereas their entourages were denied access. In order to enforce this rule, an inn was built outside the academy gates to house the teachers and their entourage.¹¹

II.2. The First Fencing Masters at Soro Academy

In a letter from the 14th October 1623, King Christian IV had decided upon which fencing master he desired as teacher at Soro Academy. Thus, the Danish nobleman Iver Krabbe traveled to Paris to conclude an agreement with the fencing master Vincentius Vanocelli.

⁸ Mackeprang, “Christian IVs Ridderakademi og Skolen”, p. 390.

⁹ Kancelliets Brevbøger (1622), p. 290.

¹⁰ Kancelliets Brevbøger (1624), p. 26. The text is translated from Renaissance Danish into modern English and for reasons of clarity slightly shortened by the author of this article.

¹¹ Kancelliets brevboøger (1624), p. 13.

The fencing master was asked to teach the students the use of the rapier and pike, how to fight in the foot tournament, and flag semaphore. The pay was set at a maximum of 800 *rigsdaler*.

The letter from the 14th October 1623 also mentions that the fencing master was to bring another fencer with him to the academy to assist with demonstrations as well as providing extra help. This was to be paid at Vanocelli's own expense. It was also prohibited for the fencing master to receive special gifts from the young noblemen he taught.¹² This clearly indicates that fencing lessons were carefully scheduled and that one could not purchase extra lessons. Such measures were taken in order to ensure that the young noblemen kept their focus on more "serious" studies. This is confirmed in written sources from 1643 and 1658 where the teachers who taught the nobles' exercises were told never to teach without the approval of the academy's superintendent, again in order not to lure the young noblemen away from their more important studies.¹³

Whether Iver Krabbe succeeded and persuaded the fencing master Vincentius to come to Soro Academy is uncertain. However, on the 21st December 1623, the Danish king sent another letter to the superintendent at Soro Academy (Jost Høg), in which he wrote that a fencing master would be sent to Soro to inspect the conditions. The king would even negotiate with the fencing master, but he asked to know upfront what the fencing master demanded as payment for his work. In a royal letter from January 18th 1624, it is noted that two French persons stayed at Soro Academy.¹⁴ It is sadly not clear whether it is Vincentius from Paris and his helper.

As mentioned, the fencing master at Soro Academy taught swordsmanship, the use of the pike, preparation for foot tournaments, and semaphore. However, in August 1624, the king asked Captain Antoni Flores to teach the young noblemen in the use of pike and musket and "all that a soldier should know".¹⁵ Whether the captain's new position as a teacher at Soro Academy was welcomed by the fencing master is doubtful. Shortly hereafter, the king asked the academy's superintendent Jost Høg to negotiate between Antoni Flores and the fencing master Hans Willum about their relative wages (The fencing master is here mentioned by name for the first time as Hans Willum and not Vincentius). As mentioned earlier, training with the pike and musket were usually part of the fencing master's tasks, meaning Antoni Flores' salary was to be deducted from the fencing master's overall salary.¹⁶

¹² Kancelliets Brevbøger (1623), p. 701.

¹³ Mackeprang, "Christian IVs Ridderakademi og Skolen", p. 13.

¹⁴ Kancelliets Brevbøger (1623), p. 756.

¹⁵ Kancelliets Brevbøger (1624), p. 237.

¹⁶ Kancelliets brevbøger (1624), p. 255.

A small epilogue can be added to the story of Antoni Flores' and Hans Willums' wages. In December 1627, the king wrote to the academy's superintendent and put the fencing master's salary at 500 *rigsdaler* annually and said that he could now dismiss Antoni Flores (and use Antoni Flores' old salary to cover the fencing master's new salary).¹⁷ The captain's days at Soro Academy were thus probably over.

In later letters, the fencing master's name is corrected from Hans Willum to Hans Wilhelm. The fencing master Hans Willum/Wilhelm is most likely identical to the German fencing master Hans Wilhelm Schöffner. In his youth, Hans Wilhelm Schöffner studied at Salvator Fabris' famous fencing school in Padua. In a later 1677 reissue of Salvator Fabris' great work from 1606 are mentioned in the preface a number of fencing masters who were directly inspired by Fabris. Apparently Hans Wilhelm did not study directly under Salvator Fabris, but only at Fabris' school in Padua. In the preface he is titled as "*vorfechter*" having learned fencing from paired practice at the school and not directly from Salvator Fabris. Originally, Hans Wilhelm came from Marburg but is mentioned as the fencing master at Soro Academy.¹⁸ In 1620, Hans Wilhelm wrote a major fencing manual entitled *Gründtliche Vñ eigentliche Beschreibung der Fechtkunst*.¹⁹ The fencing manual contains a great amount of lessons in fencing with the rapier and the rapier combined with dagger. The manual is over 600 pages long and is richly illustrated.

II.3. The French Fencing Master Beaufort

On 25th July 1636 a new fencing master named Beaufort was appointed at Soro Academy. First and foremost, the fencing master had to teach the king's son Valdemar Christian, but also be willing to frequently teach the other young noblemen at the school. For this he received half the salary, 400 *rigsdalere*, compared to the previous fencing master Hans Wilhelm's 800 *rigsdalere*. In return for his faithful service to the academy, Hans Wilhelm henceforth received a pension of 400 *rigsdalere* each year until his death.²⁰ The question is whether or not Hans Wilhelm in some way continued, perhaps at reduced hours, to teach the young noblemen at the academy. It is clear that Beaufort first and foremost had to concentrate on the king's son and only complement his work hours with teaching other young noblemen, leaving open the possibility that Hans Wilhelm continued in his role to teach other students. However, shortly thereafter, the French fencing master was awarded a full position at Soro Academy. In a letter from 28th June 1636, the Danish King wrote to the academy's superintendent Jost Høg, stating that the French fencing master, who

¹⁷ Kancelliets Brevbøger (1627), p. 258.

¹⁸ Leoni, *The Art of Dueling*, p. 30.

¹⁹ Digital reproduction available online
(<http://resolver.sub.uni-goettingen.de/purl?PPN521378737>), accessed July 2016).

²⁰ Kancelliets brevboøger (1636), p. 605.

until then had taught the king's son at the academy, should gain full employment as fencing master at the academy in Hans Wilhelm's place.²¹

The idea that Hans Wilhelm somehow continued teaching at the academy, perhaps at reduced hours, is strengthened by a later written source. On the 23rd May 1642, the king sent a letter to the academy's superintendent and ordered him to write to Hans Wilhelm from Strassbough, and inform the "new" Hans Wilhelm that the King wanted him as a new fencing master at the academy.²² Here it is very interesting that the new fencing master's salary is set to equal Hans Wilhelm Schöffers.²³ There is no mentioning of the French fencer Beaufort at all. Therefore, it seems likely, that Beaufort had now, in 1642, disappeared completely out of the picture. This leaves room for the idea that Hans Wilhelm somehow continued being active until 1642. Exactly when Beaufort or Hans Wilhelm Schöffers resigned their positions is not known. It is also a possibility that they both had died. Hans Wilhelm Schöffers was with certainty dead in 1646 (as mentioned later in this article).

The French fencing master's time at Sorø Academy did not go unnoticed and was even referred to in famous Renaissance comedies. The author, Professor Lauremberg, was appointed professor of mathematics at the Academy in 1623,²⁴ but was also known for his satirical comedies.²⁵ Besides teaching mathematics, the professor also taught fortress technology and all things concerning warfare and military matters. Thus, the professor had extensive knowledge of warfare in general, and to say the least, he did not hold the Danish nobility's focus on civilian fencing and the personal duel in high esteem. The professor wrote the following concerning the Danish nobility.

Their thoughts dwell on cribs and oats, on the sword that hangs as finery
at their side, and on the musket, by which they shoot game for the
breakfast table.²⁶

This is strongly emphasized later in the text where the professor writes.

The rest of the day goes so with exercises in fencing under a French
fencing teacher, for apparently, a countryman cannot not teach him to
beat his neighbor to death. A simple soldier, a robber, a coachman or

²¹ Kancelliets brevbøger (1536), p. 588.

²² Kancelliets brevbøger (1642), p. 153.

²³ Kancelliets brevbøger (1642), p. 223.

²⁴ Kancelliets brevbøger (1623), p. 603. The text in quotation below is translated from Renaissance Danish into modern English and for reasons of clarity and meaning slightly shortened by the author of this article.

²⁵ Skovgaard-Petersen, "Sorø Akademi og den truede lærdom - Laurembergs latinske satire"

²⁶ Daac, "Om Humanisten og Satirikerne Johann Lauremberg", p. 31.

peasant can beat up a fellow human being with a spade or strike him with a spear. However, the nobleman (and with huge expenses) learns to do so according to all the rules. For glory and honour, you heir of old heroes, require that you use all your diligence to learn all the different fencing “tricks” and what is now called the art of fencing, all tempos and all positions, how does one feint and what does it takes to hit the opponent’s throat, and how you can stab him in the lung; and this is against the man you yesterday called your friend, and tomorrow can kill in a duel. The young demigod must learn to daringly challenge his equal if they have become divided by the cup (drinking). Apparently it is a much bigger honour to achieve this than to fight for his native country and the ancestral faith in honest war. The hero who falls in such an honest battle gets no eulogy read over his grave, no reading aloud of the list of great-grandfathers that leads his genealogy back to antiquity, but only birds pricking in his corpse. Therefore, the young nobleman does not hesitate to choose the duel instead of the pen, tearing books apart and sacrificing his youth and life for fencing.²⁷

Here particularly one should note the ironic and sarcastic tone with which Lauremberg questions the decision to hire a foreign French fencing master and bring him to the country, as if fencing was not something Danes could teach their young noblemen themselves. He also questions the relevance and the utility of learning such fencing. He clearly states that fencing is reduced to tricks and “subterfuge” in comparison to where a nobleman can really win honour; on the battlefield in a struggle for his country and his faith. In other words, civil rapier fencing was thought of as a waste of time and a degenerate code of honour.

How widespread this view was in Danish society is not known. However, one can safely assume that such satires were to some extent representative of socio-political attitudes back then. Also, several examples of prominent Danish nobles who profoundly condemned and denounced in particular the senseless waste of life that rapier fencing and dueling caused can also be found.

However, the concept of honour stood strong amongst the European social elite and was an important part of the identity formation process that the elite went through between 1450-1700. This process also emphasized virtue and general education. Together they created a triumvirate which greatly reflected the state’s ideological thinking and views

²⁷ Daae, ”Om Humanisten og Satirikerne Johann Lauremberg”, pp. 31-32.

regarding material culture at the time. In the Danish King Frederick II's (ruled 1559-1588) law from 1562, that applied to members of court,²⁸ is stated the following:

That when a courtier or warrior at the court is challenged by someone else, then he can't be judged for fighting the duel, as it is a matter of self-defense. For if he was provoked, then it would be his honor too near.

However, it was, from a government point of view, far from desirable that the kingdom's best men risked their lives in duels of honour - a view which can be traced back to Professor Lauremberg's sarcastic comments on the lessons of Beaufort.

II.4. The Fencing Master Hans Vilhelm Eller

In 1642, a new fencing master by the name of Hans Wilhelm Eller was hired to teach at Soro Academy. During this fencing master's tenure, one is given a rare glimpse of how much time the young nobles were expected to spend on the noble art of fencing. On the 2nd May 1642, King Christian IV wrote to the principal of Soro Academy with instructions concerning the daily education of his son, Ulrik Christian. In the letter is specified that the prince was to receive half an hour of fencing and half an hour of dancing lessons each day. In addition, the fencing master should periodically (and every Saturday afternoon if possibly) teach Prince Ulrik Christian in the musket and the pike.²⁹ Thus by all accounts, the prince was taught by himself and not as part of a larger class.

The question is whether or not the other young noblemen received their lessons in single or group lessons. As mentioned earlier, the fencing lessons were strictly scheduled by the academy's principal and only took place on special days when they did not interfere with the other classes. According to a source from 1658, this was either on Wednesday or Saturday, between 8-10 in the morning or 1-3 in the afternoon.³⁰ This clearly points towards group lessons and explains the young noblemen's desires for one-to-one lessons with the fencing master; something that was worth paying extra for, since it could ultimately mean the difference between life or death in a duel. One should also remember, that the fencing master not only taught rapier fencing but also use of the musket, the pike and instruction in semaphore, and had to incorporate these subjects within his limited teaching time.

Hans Wilhelm Eller served as fencing master at Soro Academy from 1642-1664/65. The fencing master's exact age is not known, but in 1661 the king began to think about a

²⁸ Olsen, *Fægningens og Duellens Historie*, p. 36 (drawing from Forordninger, Recesser og andre kongelige Breve – ed. Secher). The text is translated from Renaissance Danish into modern English and for reasons of clarity and meaning slightly shortened by the author of this article.

²⁹ Kancelliets brevbøger (1642), p. 95.

³⁰ Mackeprang, "Christian IVs Ridderakademi og Skolen", p. 413.

replacement for Hans Wilhelm (or at least extra help). Thus, a letter was given to the fencing master's son, Hans Casimir Eller, that stated he was to become the next fencing master at Soro Academy after his father.³¹ The academy closed down in 1664/1665 and it is doubtful whether or not Hans Casimir ever got to function as a fully employed fencing master at the academy, but instead as more of a practical help for his father Hans Wilhelm, who continued as fencing master of the academy until it was closed.

By all accounts the fencing master and his son continued as fencing masters in Copenhagen after the academy closed in 1664/65. However, Hans Wilhelm's days were numbered. In registers of baptisms, marriages and funerals in the years 1670 - 1675 exists a note that on 13th May 1671 permission was given to move the corpse of Hans Wilhelm from Copenhagen to Soro for burial.

III. FENCING MANUALS THAT RELATE TO SORO ACADEMY

Of the three known fencing masters who taught at Soro Academy, it is only Hans Wilhelm Schöffner that is known to have published a fencing manual, and this was published before he was hired. However, three fencing manuals were written by students of the Academy.

Two of these can be dated to the time of Hans Wilhelm Eller's tenure. One was written by an anonymous German student at the academy (1657),³² and the second in Danish by the Danish nobleman Mogens Krabbe (1656).³³ It is particularly interesting that these fencing manuals can be seen as containing pure knowledge (i.e. having being produced without political and economic motivations behind the writings); the students wrote down the master's teachings as they were directly taught. There of course exists the possibility that the students have misunderstood the master's teachings, but the amount of external factors that can affect the understanding of the material have been considerably reduced. As a real school notebook, in the case of this second book (Mogens Krabbe's), one can clearly see the student's handwriting vary from being neat to almost illegible.

There exists a third fencing manual that relates to Soro Academy. The manual was published in Copenhagen in 1646 under the title *Den Ridderlige og Adelige Fecht-Konstis grundelige oc Methodiske Beskriffuelse, som udi dette Exertio sig forlyste oc versere, som ved en Gienvey, til Eenfache Rapiers Kundskab baade udi Stød oc Hug at gjøre imod den*

³¹ Ibid., p. 398.

³² Wolfenbüttel, Herzog-August Library, Cod. Guelf. 264.23 Extrav.

³³ Magni Krabbes Fægtebog, Soer, 1656 (Copenhagen, Det kongelige Bibliotek, NKS 79 oktav.).

Keigthaaudet Saavel som imod den Ræthaandet.³⁴ The manual contains, in addition to a long foreword, numerous lessons in rapier fencing for both right-handed and left-handed pupils. The part of the manual that contains the rapier lessons is completely identical to those seen in the English rapier manual *Pallas Armata*. At the same time, it is immensely interesting that the initials G. A. are used in both manuals. There can be little doubt that the author of the two fencing manuals is the same person. In the Danish version the author writes how his knowledge derived from the fencing master Hans Wilhelm Schöffner who taught at Soro Academy. At the time of writing in 1646 Hans Wilhelm Schöffner had passed away.

In an introduction which can be perceived as either modest or boastful, G.A. describes how he has analyzed the manual of Hans Wilhelm Schöffner, methodically edited it, and added some of his own knowledge acquired from both his own experiences and those of his friends from their time at the Royal Academy. In the preface G. A. dedicates his manual to a list of close friends (the list contains the names of numerous members of the upper Danish nobility), which most likely point towards the author's origins as being Danish.

The most likely candidate as author of *Pallas Armata* and *Den Ridderlige og Adelige Fecht-Konstis grundelige oc Methodiske Beskriffuelse* is the Danish nobleman Gabriel Knudsen Akeleye (1612-1654). In 1627 he went to study at Soro Academy during the tenure of Hans Wilhelm Schöffner. From 1636 he studied in England at Oxford, where he may have completed *Pallas Armata* in 1639. In 1641 he seems to have returned to Denmark, where he gained a position as lieutenant in the Navy. Later, in 1643, he gained a position as an official in the Danish state. Moreover, in 1649 he sent a personal handwritten fencing manuscript to Jørgen Seefeldt, the owner of one of the biggest libraries in Denmark, which was said to rival that of the King.³⁵ Thus, the manuscript could be the original source for *Pallas Armata* and *Den Ridderlige og Adelige Fecht-Konstis grundelige oc Methodiske Beskriffuelse*. The library was plundered by Swedish troops during the war with Carl X Gustav (1657-1660). Most of the stolen books later went into the Peter Julius Coyet collection. With some luck it hopefully can be found again.

Thus, there seem to have existed a special educational environment at the academy, where students may have been encouraged to record their fencing lessons. These circumstances are unique across Europe. It is striking that the students first and foremost, and in all

³⁴ Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Sachsen-Anhalt (digital reproduction <<http://digital.bibliothek.uni-halle.de/hd/content/pageview/1798043>>, accessed July 2016).

³⁵ Dansk Biografisk Lexikon (first edition, Akeleye, Gabriel Knudsen), p. 161.

three manuals, especially emphasize the fact that they studied at the prestigious Soro Academy. The manual from 1646 and the German manual from 1657 also mention the fencing masters to whom the specific knowledge in the manuals can be ascribed. Mogens Krabbe is the only author who does not mention his fencing master by name.

IV. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article was, in addition to providing an overview of fencing and martial arts at the Royal Soro Academy in the seventeenth century, to give some examples of how the numerous nuances of specific historical contexts can affect modern research in to historical European martial arts.

Initially, some very important aspects of Renaissance Europe were addressed. It was a Europe much influenced by the exchange and spread of ideas, but also by enormous cultural and topographical differences throughout all its regions, principalities, kingdoms and states. The article's purpose therefore was to provide geographical and context-specific insights from a Renaissance martial arts point of view into an area of Europe characterized by a range of political considerations, ideologies, beliefs and mistrusts. Hopefully, this article demonstrates that it is hard, if not impossible, to speak in general terms and look upon Europe as a whole. No matter what period of time we are talking about, analyzing the overall context behind the scenes is needed at all times.

During their stay at Soro Academy the different fencing masters saw themselves subject to several restrictions and injunctions. At times they saw their profession belittled and even ridiculed by teachers such as Professor Lauremberg. Their lessons were not to interfere with the academy's real purpose; to educate the young noblemen for the later benefit of the Danish government. Fencing might have been seen as character building, hence the fencing masters' high salaries, but it nevertheless underwent a change from being of primary to secondary importance for the former warrior nobility who were now becoming landowners and officials.

It was, in other words, and from the government's point of view, no longer necessary to be a superior warrior in order to have a successful career at the Danish court. It is nonetheless interesting that no-one seems to have commented on the other noble exercises that purely dealt with war such as training with muskets and pikes. This is probably because a career as an officer in the Danish army still was a prestigious and financially lucrative position for the nobleman. It was only the strictly civilian rapier fencing that received harsh words. The duels of honour meant that the state lost priceless and indispensable resources. If one were to die in battle, it was for one's faith and for the state.

On one side, the pupils found themselves in a world of fashion trends, honour, and self-promotion. On the other hand, the realities were ubiquitous in the form of hard-nosed

business, thorough education, and an already determined future in service to the state. It was this changing society in which the fencing masters and their students had to navigate.

Aknoweldgment: The author of this article would especially like to thank Mr. Jan Schäfer and Mr. Reinier van Noort for their many interesting discussions on Soro Academy, the Academy's fencing masters, and especially for finding the Danish 1646 and German 1657 fencing manual.

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