

THE SABRE, OLD POLISH FENCING, AND THE CROSS-CUTTING ART

Bartosz Sieniawski



To my Father, my Brother Krzysztof and my Son Ignacy
So that the memory of our ancestors lives on in our children.

Bartosz Sieniawski

Seven years have passed since the previous article *‘The Sabre’s Many Travels – the Origins of the Cross-Cutting Art’*. Since then, our knowledge about sabre fencing in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Poland has been modified to a certain extent, but a large portion of our conclusions remains unchanged and is still valid. Has anyone been writing about the Polish sabre in Europe at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? What would the Old Polish way of fencing have been like? Did Poles create their own fencing style in that time period? In the face of these questions, we have decided to release a set of publications that expands on some of the issues discussed in the previous article, and provide supplementary material in the form of translations and interpretations of a variety of relevant source texts and illustrations. This study also includes short biographies of key figures as well as a linguistic and semantic analysis of the terminology for the weapons discussed.

We have worked in cooperation with the following specialists to analyse, translate, and interpret the sources contained within this study:

Latin translation

Bert Gevaert (*Belgium*), Luca Basile (*Italy*)

Italian translation

Luca Basile (*Italy*)

German translation

Kevin Maurer (*USA*), Ruben Ragno (*Italy*)

Spanish translation

Jorge Luis Pacheco Ancheyta (*Mexico*)

Turkish translation

Parker Cook (*USA*)

Help with interpretation

Marek Helman (*Poland*), Luca Basile (*Italy*)

All English translation from Polish

Daria Izdebska (*Poland*)

Layout design

Marcin Chochlik Wasilewski (*Poland*)

Without the help, support, and commitment of the people mentioned above, our reconstruction would have never been possible.

THE SABRE

Reconstructing the Polish techniques of sabre fencing from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is a particularly challenging task. This is primarily caused by the dearth of surviving source materials from the period, as well as the need for specialist translations, the terse nature of existing texts, and the need for access to a thorough knowledge of the history of fencing. To accomplish this uneasy task, one must not only identify and find the relevant sources, but also analyse them in depth, translate them, and, above all, understand them thoroughly. During such tedious and time-consuming work, sources are examined page after page by looking for key paragraphs, sentences, or even single words that could enrich our existing knowledge, unlock new understandings, or change past conclusions.

In order to find the relevant passages pertaining to sabre fencing in the various treatises and manuscripts, we also needed to analyse the nomenclature of these types of weapons in historical languages of Europe and the Middle East. We were able to identify key words, which we used as signposts that would point us to passages worthy of further investigation. In our search, we relied largely on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts, considering them the most trustworthy.

/WORD/ (Language) – AUTHOR OR MANUSCRIPT TITLE:

Szabla/Tesaczek/Tesak (Polish) – Stanisław Sarnicki/Mikołaj Rej/Łukasz Górnicki.

Sabel/Dussacken/Dusacken/Duseggen/Dosacken/Dusacke (German) – Michael Hundt, Fredrich Meyer, Heinrich Gunterrodt, Joachim Meyer, Jacob Sutor, Paulus Hector Mair, Codex Guelf 83.

Sciabla/Scimitarra (Italian) – Francesco Antonio Marcelli, Giuseppe D'Alessandro.

Acinacis (Latin) – Heinrich Gunterrodt, Paulus Hector Mair, Michael Hundt.

Shamshir/Kilij/Saif (Turkish, Arabic) – Munyatu'l Ghuzat, Tuhfetu'l Guzhat.

Looking at the above, it is clear that the majority of treatises and manuscripts (at least, those discovered so far) which describe the use of sabre/dussack at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were written in German. To understand why the German sources about the sabre (*säbel*) and dussack would be crucial to the reconstruction of sabre fencing in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, we need to look more closely at the history and meaning of the German word dussack.



In fencing treatises dussack (also dusack, dysack, tasak, tesak, tuseckin, thuseckin, disackn, dusägge, dusegge, dusegg) is a kind of wooden curved sabre-shaped weapon with a long front edge and a short back edge.

We do not know exactly what the origins of the dussack are, but it is generally acknowledged that dussack came to the German states via Hungary, which, after the fall of Constantinople, gradually began adopting elements of the Turkish art of warfare, including weapons and armour. It is assumed that the decisive moment that determined the widespread use of sabre in Hungary was the Battle of Mochacz, during which the Hungarian army was soundly defeated by the Ottoman Empire.

Another theory suggests that the messer (*langes messer*) simply underwent an ‘evolution’ and took the form of a wooden dussack at the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This theory has many supporters, but contrastive analysis of the fencing techniques with messer and dussack shows considerable differences in the use of both weapons.

FIGHTING WITH THE DUSSACK CAN BE DIFFERENTIATED FROM THE MESSER IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS:

- No binding of the opponent’s blade.
- Complete lack of hand protection (nagel).
- Partial departure from using grabs and levers with the use of an extended hilt.
- Partial departure from using complex wrestling techniques.

Moreover, a linguistic analysis clearly points to an eastern origin of the dussack – though that does not mean that the two theories are mutually exclusive.

PAULUS HECTOR MAIR (*Paulsen Hektor Mair*, *Paulus Hector Meyer*, 1517 - 1579) was a 16th century German aristocrat, civil servant, and fencer. He was born in 1517 to a wealthy and influential Augsburg patrician family. In his youth, he likely received training in fencing and grappling from the masters of Augsburg fencing guild, and early on developed a deep fascination with fencing treatises.

Mair’s martial background is unknown, but as a citizen of a free city he would have had military obligations whenever the city went to war, and as a member of a patrician family he likely served in the cavalry. He was also an avid collector of fencing treatises and other literature on military history. Like his contemporary Joachim Meyer, Mair believed that the Medieval martial arts were being forgotten, and he saw this as a tragedy, idealizing the arts of fencing as a civilizing and character-building influence on men. Where Meyer sought to update the traditional fencing systems and apply them to contemporary weapons of war and defense, Mair was more interested in preserving historical teachings intact. Thus, some time in the latter part of the 1540s he commissioned what would become the most extensive compendium of German fencing treatises ever made, a massive two-volume manuscript compiling virtually every fencing treatise he could access. He retained Jörg Breu the Younger to create the illustrations for the text, and hired two Augsburg fencers to pose for the illustrations. This project was extraordinarily expensive and took at least four years to complete. Ultimately, three copies of this compendium were produced, each more extensive than the last; the first (*MSS Dresden C.93/C.94*) was written in Early New High German, the second and most artistically ambitious (*Cod.icon. 393*) in New Latin, and the rougher third version (*Cod. 10825/10826*) incorporated both languages.

Mair not only spent incredible sums of money on his fencing interests, but generally led a lavish lifestyle and maintained his political influence with expensive parties and other entertainments for the burghers and patricians of Augsburg. This habit of living far beyond his means for decades exhausted his family’s wealth, eventually leading him to sell the Latin version of his fencing manuscript and finally to begin embezzling money from the Augsburg city coffers. This embezzlement was not discovered for many years (or perhaps was overlooked due to the favor his parties garnered), until finally in 1579 a disgruntled assistant reported him to the Augsburg City Council and provoked an audit of his books. Mair was arrested, tried, and hanged as a thief at the age of 62. After Mair’s death, his effects (including his library) were sold at auction to recoup some of the funds he had embezzled



Paulus Hector Mair execution – Zurich Ms. F 28, f205r.



Paulus Hector Mair “Mscr. Dresd. C. 93” 1540.

PAULUS HECTOR MAIR remains one of the most influential figures in the history of Kunst des Fechtens. By completing the fencing manual of Antonius Rast, Mair gave us valuable insight into the Nuremberg fencing tradition; his own works are impressive on both an artistic and practical level, and his extensive commentary on the fencing illustrations in his collection serves to make potentially useful training aids out of what would otherwise be mere curiosities. Finally, in purchasing so many important fencing treatises he succeeded in preserving them for future generations; they were purchased by the fabulously wealthy Fugger family after his death and ultimately passed to the Augsburg University Library, where they remain to this day.¹

Considering the scope and aims of Mair’s work, it is highly unlikely that he would fail to mention or describe the use of a weapon as popular as the sabre was at the time in his compendium, especially considering the treatise contains such exotic weapons as flail, scythe, or sickle. More importantly, in the Latin version of P.H. Mair’s compendium, the word dussack is translated as acinacis, which, according to the Latin dictionaries of that time meant *a curved sabre (getrümbter Sabel)*! But more on that later...

The second figure important to the understanding of dussack is JOACHIM MEYER (ca. 1537 - 1571) a 16th century German Freifechter and fencing master. He was the last major figure in the tradition of the German grand master Johannes Liechtenauer, and in the last years of his life he devised at least three distinct and quite extensive fencing manuals. Meyer’s writings incorporate both the traditional Germanic technical syllabus and contemporary systems that he encountered in his travels, including Italian rapier fencing. In addition to his fencing practice, Meyer was a Burgher and a master cutler. Meyer was born in Basel, where he presumably apprenticed as a cutler. He writes in his books that he

¹Source: Wiktenauer.com | Autor: Michael Chidester

traveled widely in his youth, most likely a reference to the traditional Walz that journeyman craftsmen were required to take before being eligible for mastery and membership in a guild. Journeymen were often sent to stand watch and participate in town and city militias (a responsibility that would have been amplified for the warlike cutlers' guild), and Meyer learned a great deal about foreign fencing systems during his travels. It's been speculated by some fencing historians that he trained specifically in the Bolognese school of fencing, but this doesn't stand up to closer analysis.



Joachim Meyer „MS A.4.2“ 1560 A pair of fencers, one of whom is wearing Polish or Hungarian style clothing (interestingly, such a depiction is found only in the section on the dussack)



Joachim Meyer „Gründtliche Beschreibung der Kunst des Fechtens“ 1570.

Meyer probably wrote his first manuscript (MS A.4.2) in either 1560 or 1568 for Otto Count von Sulms, Minzenberg, and Sonnenwaldt.[7] Its contents seem to be a series of lessons on training with long sword, dussack, and rapier. His second manuscript (MS Var.82), written between 1563 and 1570 for Heinrich Graf von Eberst, is of a decidedly different nature. Like many fencing manuscripts from the previous century, it is an anthology of treatises by a number of prominent German masters. Finally, on 24 February 1570 Meyer completed (and soon thereafter published) an enormous multi-weapon treatise entitled *Gründtliche Beschreibung der Kunst des Fechtens* (“A Thorough Description of the Art of Combat”); it was dedicated to Johann Casimir, Count Palatine of the Rhine, and illustrated at the workshop of Tobias Stimmer. Meyer’s works are an invaluable source of knowledge about fencing of the late sixteenth century thanks to his precise and technical descriptions. The rich and elaborate illustrations allow us to follow in detail the mechanics of motion of the fencers and to see crucial details that were previously impossible to see.²

The third and key figure for our further considerations is **HEINRICH VON GUNTERRODT** (*Henricus a Gunterrodt, Henricus a Gunterroda*) was a 16th century Saxon nobleman and fencing historian. He was born in Lengefeld in 1557 to Hans von Gunterrodt (1526-1566) and Elisabet von der Linda (d. 1564), probably in Schloss Rauenstein. He received an extensive education befitting the child of nobility, learning both Greek and Latin as well as studying the law. He apparently studied at the University of Wittenberg but it is unclear if he ever earned a formal degree.³

^{2,3} Source: Wiktenauer.com | Autor: Michael Chidester

Et quia informatore ad hanc artem usus sum fidelissimo Balthasaro Cra-
monio Polnauensi Pomerano. Medicinae studioso et discipulo huius H. W. Warh.

Balthasaro Cramonio Polnauensi Pomerano in Gunterrodt treatise.

Quite crucial to our discussion here is the fact that Gunterrodt's fencing master was no other than **BALTHASAR KRAMON POLE FROM POMERANIA**. In the original Latin version of Gunterrodt's treatise, his name is written as Balthasaro Cramonio Polnauensi Pomerano.

We know that Balthasar was a Pole and studied medicine and that he had been attacked, and during the fight his left hand was cut off, so afterwards he was only able to use his right. Thus, when teaching weapons requiring the use of both hands (such as longsword), his instruction focused mostly on theory.

In 1578, aged 22, Gunterrodt wrote a manuscript treatise on swordsmanship entitled *Sciomachia et hoplomachia* ('Unarmed and Armed Combat'), which was later published in an extended version as *De Veris Principiis Artis Dimicatoria* ('Of The True Principles of the Art of Combat'). The treatise contains information on the history of fencing and the use of several different types of weapons.

The treatise is quite unique in how it deals with the sabre. Gunterrodt orders the description of different weapons in a way that is quite dissimilar to other German treatises. In the latter, longsword is always the first weapon to be mentioned. Gunterrodt, on the other hand, devotes the first part of his treatise to a curved weapon, and includes a marginal note in German: *DUSSACKEN/SEBEL* (*dussack/sabre*).

Sunt autem armorum vsitatorum genera varia, quorum praecipua nomina, ut maxime potero, propria reuensebo. Primū in vsu est Dussacken, quod genus notari licet Acinaten sine Harpen, forma etenim conuenit: praeerea à Thyssagetis populis in Scythia et tra Sarmatus, qui sicuti Persae tam breuibus falcatis seu incuruis ensibus usi sunt, germanicum nomen uidetur esse translatum. Quo ad ipsum exercitiū, siue effectus consideretur, siue ipse certandi modus, non multo dissimile uidetur à caestuum pugna, si modo caestus fuit genus clauae, ut uolunt aliqui. Aliter autem describit et ex antiquissimis monumentis depictos proponit Doctissimus Hieronymus Mercurialis lib: 2 de arte Gymnastica cap. 9. Quam descriptionem et Virgi- lius uidetur approbare, inguens: Tum satius Anchisa caestus pater extulit aequos Et paribus palmas amborum inuexit armis.

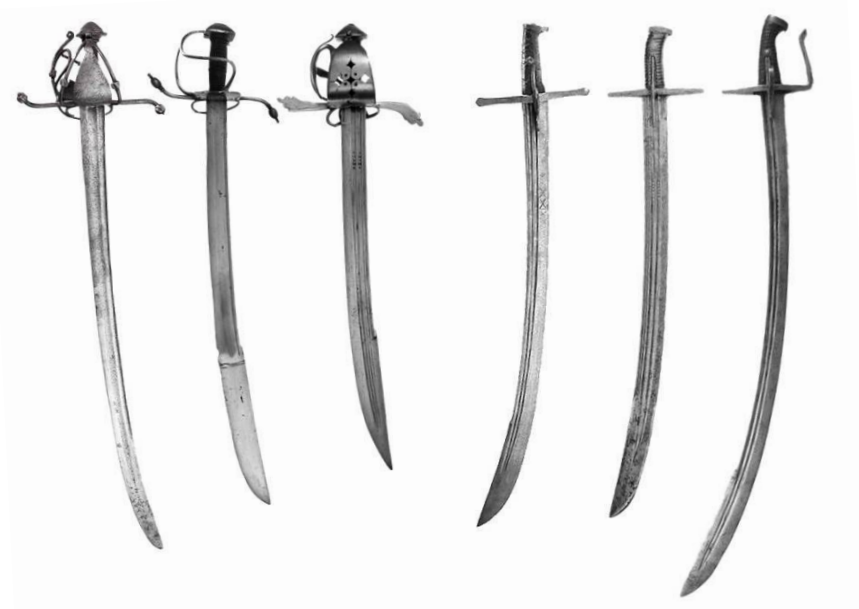
Dussacken, Sebel.

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What is more important, perhaps under the influence of Balthasar, Gunterrodt's illustrations show fencers dressed according to Hungarian or Polish fashion and armed with sabres, rather than wooden dussacks (as is the case with the other German treatises). We could postulate several different theories, which do not necessarily have to contradict one another:

- The dussack and the sabre were used in exactly the same fashion.
- Wooden dussacks, which we find in German sources, are only training aids to teach fencing with the sabre proper.
- 'Sabre' was a word used to describe any weapon of the 'eastern' type, and 'dussack' was its 'western' European equivalent.
- The dussack and sabre could have been perceived at the time as the same weapon, which differed perhaps in the length of the blade and perhaps the context of usage:
 - A shorter dussack would be an infantry weapon;
 - A longer sabre would be a cavalry weapon.

This casts doubt on theories which deny the common origin of dussack and sabre, perhaps outright negating them.



Western German sabres (dussacks) and Polish-Hungarian sabres, 16th-17th century.

It is also interesting that Gunterrodt assigns certain types of weapons to specific nations:

Dussack/sabre (*in illustrations*) – Poles, Hungarians, Turks
Longsword (*in illustrations*) – Germans
Rapier and dagger (*in text*) – the French
Rapier and buckler (*in text*) – Scots and Englishmen
Rapier and gauntlet (*in text*) – Italians
Rapier and cape (*in text*) – Spaniards

From Gunterrodt's treatise, we can assume that sabre fencing was quite popular among the eastern nations (*Turks, Hungarians, Poles*), and that Germans adopted different techniques for their use. For example, just because rapier was used by Italians, French, Germans, and Spaniards, does not mean that the way these weapons were used was radically different between these nations. This is further reinforced by the fact that from the second half of the sixteenth century, the Italian school of fencing dominated across Europe, from which several different schools and styles eventually emerged. Specific national differences could be seen in the choices that fencers made in terms of their fencing repertoire, which was selected from a range of different techniques available for a weapon of a similar construction

A weapon is a tool created for a specific purpose: to pierce mail, crush plate, or cut through a gambeson or tunic. This purpose often shapes how the weapon is constructed and how it is altered to fit these goals. I will clarify this with a few examples:

- Piercing through mail requires a straight blade with a reinforced cross-section which enhances the rigidity of the blade and thus its ability to penetrate, which in turn causes the links in chainmail to break. (POLISH KONCERZ, AN EQUIVALENT OF THE FRENCH ESTOC.)
- Cutting through a soft tunic requires a curved blade, which, thanks to its shape, assists the cut, allowing the blade to slice more easily. (SABRE.)
- Piercing or crushing plate armour requires a heavy object that terminates in a spike with a reinforced cross-section, which will punch through the thick protective layer thanks to its weight, shape and balance. (POLISH NADZIAK, A TYPE OF WARHAMMER OR PICK.)

The above examples show some of the thought processes and technical know-how underlying the creation of weapons. This means that regardless of location, weapons of similar constructions will be used in similar ways. It is the nature of the two-way relationship between the construction of the weapon and its intended use, where the weapon is designed with a specific effect in mind and is beholden to laws of physics and the universal biomechanics of the body.



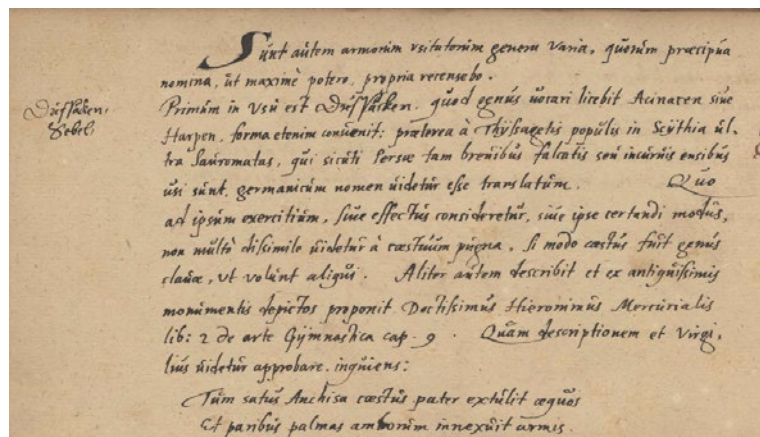
Using the long edge of the sabre

Heinrich von Gunterrodt "De Veris Principiis Artis Dimicatoria Et Tractatus Brevis" 1579.

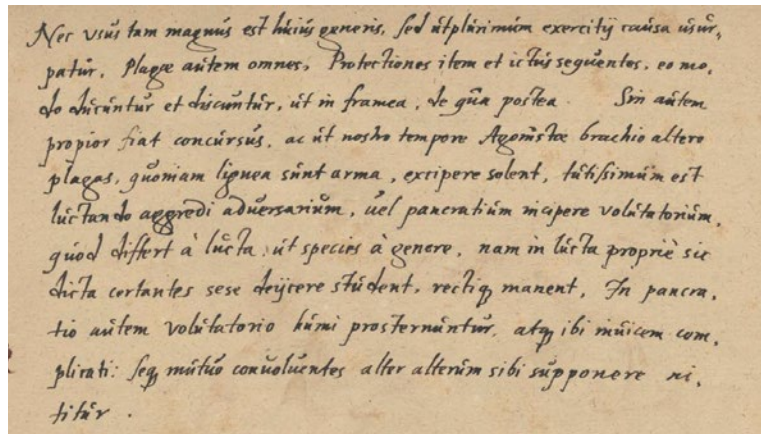


Using the short edge of the sabre.
Heinrich von Gunterrodt "De Veris Principiis Artis Dimicatoria Et Tractatus Brevis" 1579.

Below, you will find the scans and translation of the section on dussack and sabre of Heinrich von Gunterrodt's treatise. The translation is expanded with annotations that go into more depth on particular issues that Gunterrodt discusses.



The first passage from the chapter on Dussack/Sabre.
Heinrich von Gunterrodt "De Veris Principiis Artis Dimicatoria Et Tractatus Brevis" 1579



The second passage from the chapter on Dussack/Sabre.
Heinrich von Gunterrodt "De Veris Principiis Artis Dimicatoriae Et Tractatus Brevis" 1579

TRANSLATION:

Dussack, Sabre⁴

The first weapon in use is the Dussacken, it is also possible to call this kind of weapon Acinaces or Harpes, because the form matches with these weapons. Further, it seems that the German name of this weapon is transferred from the Thyssagetae people, who lived in Scythia beyond the Sauromates. In the same way as the Persians, these people used such small sickles or curved swords. To look at the exercise itself, or the execution or the way of fighting itself, it doesn't seem to differ much from fighting with boxing straps. At least if we consider the boxing straps as a sort of club, as certain people want it to be. But the very learned Hieronymus Mercurialis describes this in another way and shows images in the second book of his On the gymnastic Art in chapter 9. This description seems also to be confirmed by Vergil, when he says: Then Anchises' son, father Aeneas, brought two equal boxing straps, attached the hands of both with equal weapons.

NOTE

It is worth mentioning that according to the reconstructions and analyses of modern scholars, hammer blows were the most common form of blows in ancient fist fighting. The motion is sweeping (in much the same way as a cut with a sword), because of the construction of the caestus, which was used in a similar way to the afore-mentioned club.



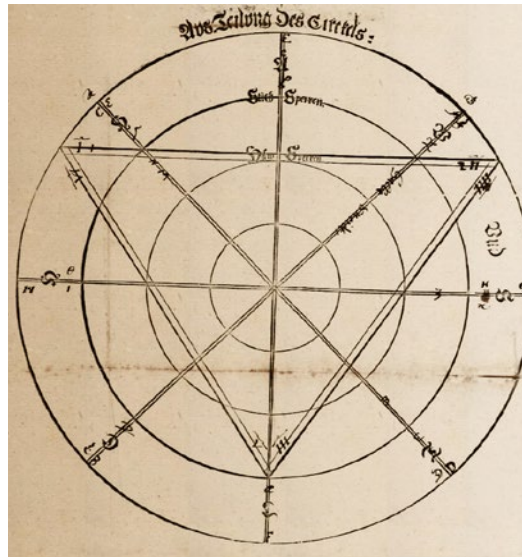
Caestus [an ancient glove made from leather strips] and Pugilat [fist fighting]
according to Hieronymus Mercurialis from his De Arte Gymnastica, 1573.

⁴Source: „The True Principles of Combat: An underestimated martial arts treatise from the 16th century. A critical edition and translation of De veris principiis artis dimicatoriae Heinrich von Gunterrodt 1579.” by Heinrich von Gunterrodt, Bert Gevaert (Translator)

The use of this kind of weapon isn't so big, but as much as possible it is applied for the sake of exercise. Every blow, also every guard and the cuts which follow out of this, are executed and taught in the same way as rapier, about which later.

NOTE

Further on in his treatise, Gunterrodt divides cuts into long (those that cross the axis of the body) and short (those that stop in the middle of the body). He also mentions that proper breathing can support and increase strength. Gunterrodt also presents a pattern called a triangle of defences, which is made of six countercuts. This supports the theory of the ubiquity and effectiveness of countercuts at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.



Triangle of Defences. Heinrich von Gunterrodt De Veris
Principiis Artis Dimicatoria Et Tractatus Brevis, 1579

But when the confrontation happens on a closer distance, and since in our time the competitors are used to parry the blows with their left hand, because the weapons are made of wood, it is safest to attack the adversary by wrestling or to start pancratium style wrestling in which one rolls on the floor.

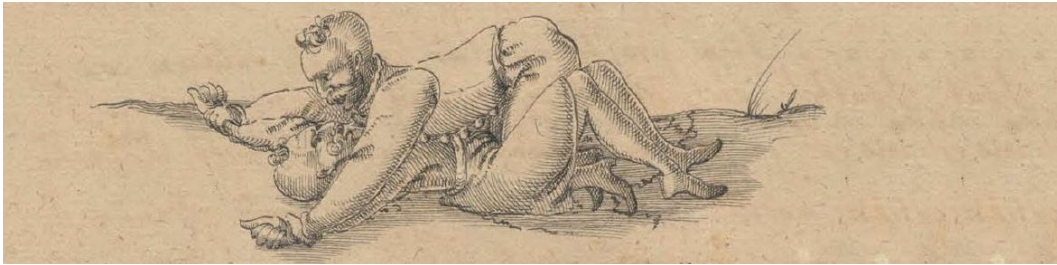
NOTE

Left-hand parries in the context of sabre appear also in a Soviet manual „Парикаоба - хевсурское фехтование” (*Parikaoba – Khevsurian fencing*), which describes a style of sabre fencing called Parikaoba or Chra-chriloba that was preserved amongst the Khevsurs, an ethnic group from the mountains of north-eastern Georgia. One of the descriptions in this manual says: “According to the Khevsurs some more experienced fencers choose to fight without a shield, using a vambrace instead.”



An armoured Khevsur parrying with a vambrace instead of a shield Парикаоба - хевсурское фехтование, В.И. Элашвили 1958.

This differs from wrestling (lucta), in the same way as a type from a kind, because it must accurately be said that in wrestling the fighters make an effort to throw the other to the ground and they stand upright. In pankration in which one rolls on the floor, one is thrown to the ground and there both are clinging to each another: they mutually roll together and both make an effort to put the other below themselves.



Pankration This differs from wrestling (lucta), in the same way as a type from a kind, because it must accurately be said that in wrestling the fighters make an effort to throw the other to the ground and they stand upright.

Notably, just like Paulus Hector Mair, Gunterrodt uses the Latin word *acinacis* to refer to a **dussack/sabre**. This term, according to several sixteenth- and seventeenth-century dictionaries, is used precisely to refer to an eastern style of sabre and not the wooden dussack, seen so often in the illustrations from the treatises!

So that these conclusions do not seem unfounded, I have included the relevant entries from contemporary dictionaries below:

Piotr Dasypodius dictionary from 1564. Published in 1642. "*Dasypodius catholicus hoc est Dictionarium Latino- Germanico Polonicum , Germanico- Latinum et Polono- Latino- Germanicum* "

Szablá/ Acinaces, is, g. m. Harpe, es, g. fo
ein gekrümbter Sebel.

Transcription:

Szabla/ Acinaces, is, g.m. Harpe, es, g. foe. ein getrumbter Sebel.

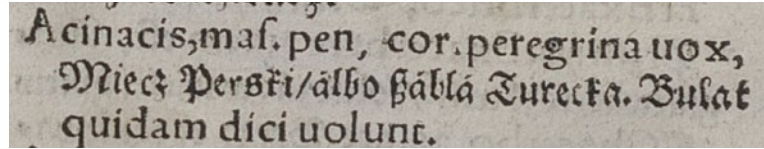
Acinacis, hujus acinacis, g. mas. Getwehr das
die Perser gebrauchē/Türkischer Säbel/Szablá.
Medus, Persicus.

Transcription:

Acinacis, hujus acinacis, g.mas. Gewehr das die Perser gebrauchte/Türkischer Säbel/
Szabla. Medus, Persicus.

Jan Mączyński dictionary from 1564

„*Dictionarium latino polonicum in usum et gratiam Polonicæ iuventutis, summa diligentia concinnatum*”

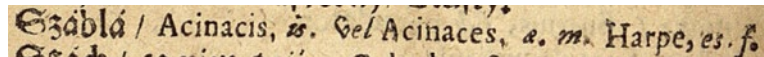


Transcription:

Acinacis, mas. pen, cor. peregrina uox, Miecz Perski/albo Szabla Turecka. Bulat quidam dici uolunt.

Grzegorz Knaplusz dictionary from 1649

“*Synonyma seu dictionarium Polono Latinum in gratiam et vsum studiosae iuventutis Polonae*”

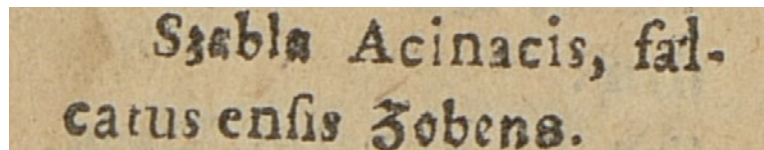


Transcription:

Szabla/ Acinacis, is. Vel Acinaces, a.m. Harpe, es.

Elger Georg dictionary from 1683

“*Dictionarium Polono-Latino-Lothauicum*”

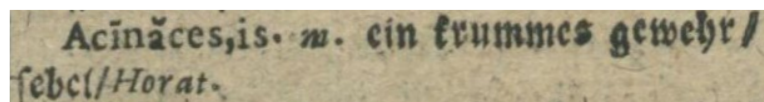


Transcription:

Szabla Acinacis, falcatus ensis zobens.

Johannes Frisii Tigurini (1505-1565) dictionary

from 1690 “*Dictionarium Bilingue. Latino Germanicum and Germanico Latinum*”

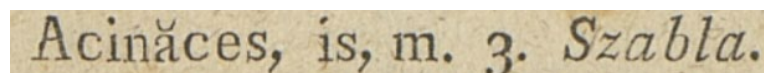


Transcription:

Acinaces, is. m. ein Krummes gewehr/ sebel/ Horat.

and Jerzy Koźmiński dictionary from 1784

“*Dictionarium Latino-Polonicum Ad Usum Publicarum In Regno Poloniae Scholarum*”



Transcription:

Acinaces, is, m. 3. Szabla

Some scholars also suggest that in Polish Latin, the sabre was referred to with the word *framea*. This word does indeed occur in the Polish version of Latin, but in light of the documents we have analysed, the term is colloquial and quite rare. In a later edition of Grzegorz Knaplusz' 1764 dictionary, it is included as a synonym of *acinacis*.

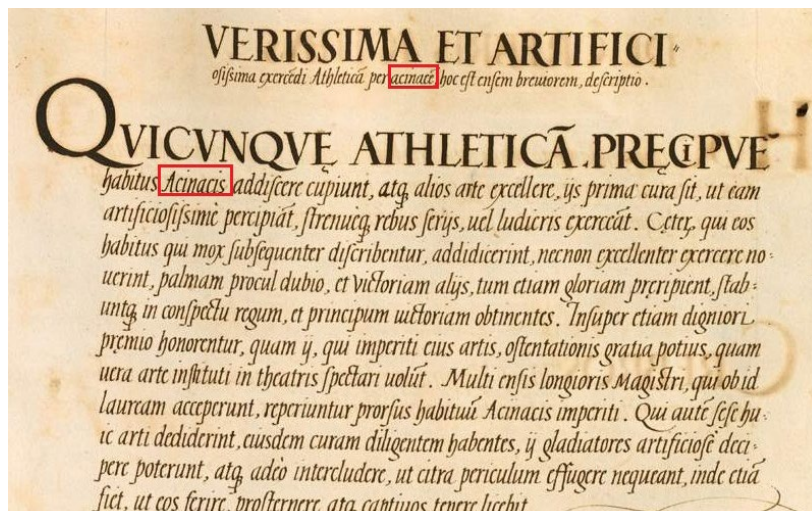
Szabla Acinacis is vel Acinaces is m f. amea

Transcription:

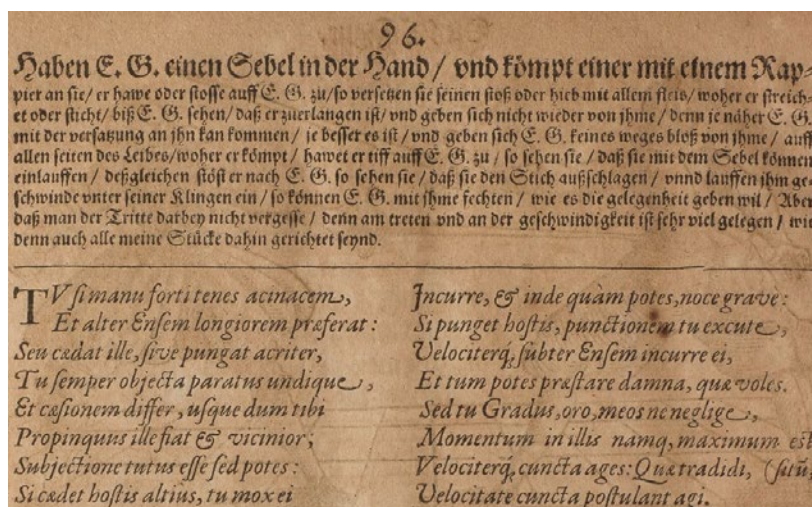
Szabla Acinacis is vel Acinaces is m Framea

Additionally, in all the manuscripts and fencing treatises written in Latin, both dussack and sabre are translated as *acinacis*.

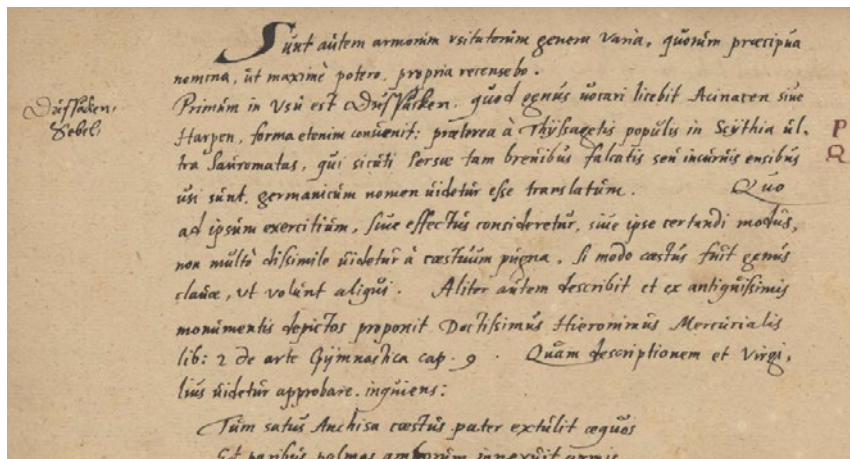
We can find examples of such usage in the following authors:



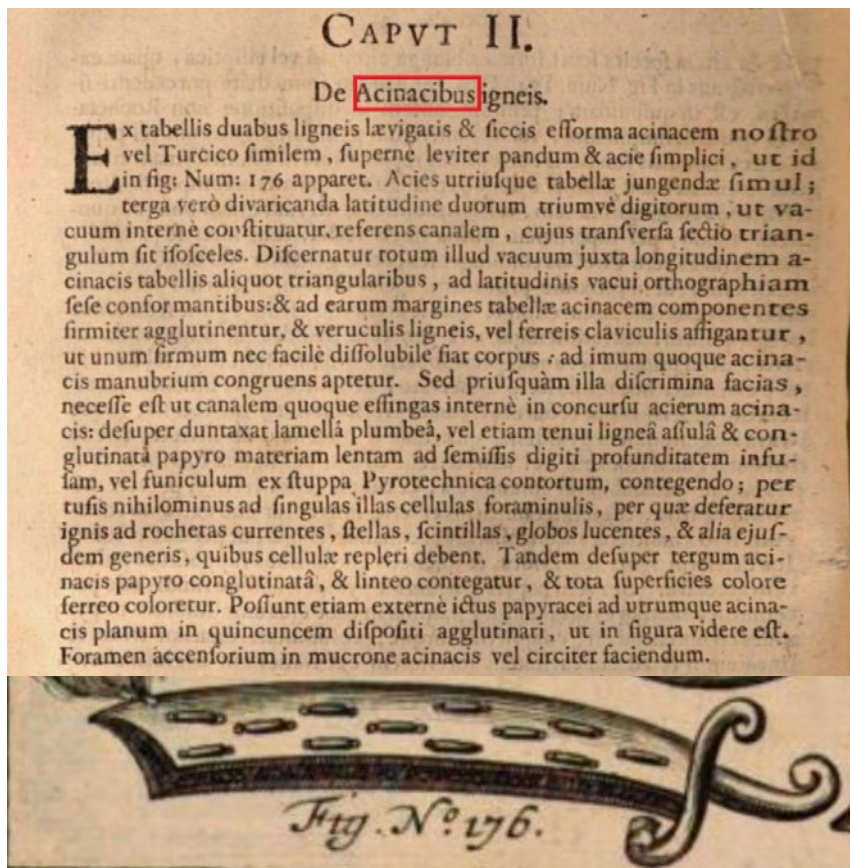
Paulus Hector Mair – the German version uses the word *Duseggen*, and the Latin equivalent is *acinacis*.



Michael Hundt – the German description has *Sebel*, and the Latin has *acinacem*.



Henrici Gunterrodt - the German marginal note uses *dussack/sebel*, and the Latin text has *acinacen*.



In a treatise by Kazimierz Siemianowicz on preparing fireworks and rockets, the illustration of a sabre is referred to as *acinacibus*.

When we look more closely at the Latin descriptions of the hussars and the Polish chronicles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, we can see that the Polish word *szabla* is also translated as *acinacis*. See below for a list of contemporary titles that contain such a translation:

Acinaces – A COLLECTION OF EXAMPLES FROM POLISH SOURCES

EXAMPLE 1

SOURCE

REINHOLD HEIDENSTEIN was the Secretary to King Stephen Bathory. The inspection of the hussars that Heidenstein describes took place on 5th August 1579.

TITLE

REINHOLDI HEIDENSTEINII *Secr: Regii, de Bello Moscovitico Commentariorum Lib: Sex*, s. 44–45, Kraków 1584.

TRANSCRIPTION

Disneq equitem ac militem Polonicum, qui tum fere omnis conuenerat Milecius elegantissime in speciem instructum, & in turmas cohortesque distributum sub signis decurrentem Regi ostendit. Equites thorace & galea ferrea tecti, praeterq; hastam, **acinace**, veruto, ac binis scloppetis ad ephippia aptis omnes armati erant, ita vt decurrentes non minorem quam ipsi pedites, quorum propria arma sclopeti sunt, fragorem ederent.

TRANSLATION

In Dzisna^I Mielecki presented almost the entire Polish army to the king, infantry and cavalry both, arranged in a beautiful tactical formation, neatly divided into Banners^{II} and Files^{III}, marching with their standards unfurled. The horsemen rode in cuirasses and iron helms, armed with a lance, **a sabre**, an estoc [koncerz] and a pair of pistols at the saddle; thus parading in front of the king, the din they made was equal to that of the infantry, whose usual weapon is the hand cannon. (based on Jan Czubek's Polish translation of Reinhold Heidenstein's *De bello Moscovitico... 'Memoirs of the Livonian War'*^{IV}, published in Lwów, 1894)

EXAMPLE 2

SOURCE

WESPAZJAN KOCHOWSKI, of the Nieczuja coat of arms, was a poet, historian, deputy of the Sejm (*Parliament*), and a hussar as well. He was born in 1633 and served in the cavalry in the years 1651–1657. When he was writing his depiction of hussars present at the Battle of Vienna in 1683 (*known also as the Relief of Vienna*), below, he was no longer a hussar, but a royal chronicler instead.

TITLE

KOCHOWSKI WESPAZJAN, *Commentarijs Belli Aduersum Turcas ad Viennam, & in Hungaria Anno CH: M. DC. LXXXIII Gesti Ductu & auspicijs Serenissimi Ac Potentissimi Ioannis III. Regis Poloniarvm Mag: DVC: Lithuaniae, &c. &c. &c. Scriptore Vespasiano a Kochow Kochowski S. R. M. Cubiculario Aulico, ac Historiographo*, s. 23, Kraków 1684.

TRANSCRIPTION

Eminebant Hussari, armorum fulgore, ac procerioribus equis conspiciendi: isti capite galeam, pectore ferreum thoracem, ab humero Leopardi aut Tygridis exuuias praeferunt, seruitia militaria lupinis teguntur. Decempes in manu hasta, trigonali cuspidem minax, cuius protensum ex serico velum, lenior aura ventilat. Lateri **acinax**, equeo oblongior ensis adhaeret, dandis caesim seu punctim vulneribus; etiam sclopus adest ex vetere instituto. Ductoribus Ordinum inaurata ex aere tegmina, ac insigni arte brachialia; praeterea su-

^IA city in modern-day Belarus. ^{II}Chorągiew, usually a cavalry unit. ^{III}Rota, usually an infantry unit. ^{IV}Heidenstein's *Memoirs* are entitled *De bello Moscovitico... 'On the Muscovite war'*, which refers to Stephan Bathory's Livonian Campaign against Muscovy in the late sixteenth century.

spensi a colo clypei pendent, discolore serico texti, ac auro celatis vmbonibus Persicum in morem rutilantes. Eae hastatorum turmae, dum campo plano commeant, speciem a longe mobilis syluae referunt, quasi ea coaequatis arborum verticibus, de loco in locum secederet.

TRANSLATION

The Hussars stood out from the throng by the splendour and shine of their armours and the beauty of their lean horses: they wore helmets and steel breastplates, their shoulders were adorned with the skins of leopards and tigers, whilst the squires¹⁵ would wear wolf skins. A ten-foot lance would rest in a hussar's hand, terminated with a triangular head, to which a silken banner was attached, fluttering in the wind. **At his side a sabre**; at the saddle a long sword capable of cutting and thrusting, and a firearm too, according to the old ways.

The officers wore gilded bronze [*or brass*] light armour [*karacena?*] and artfully crafted shoulder guards. From their necks there hung shields [*kalkans*] wrapped in colourful silks, with the bosses adorned with gold and gleaming, as is the Persian fashion. These lance companies, when they gather in the field, look from afar as if a swaying forest, the joined tips of its trees moving from place to place. (*Based on Radosław Wolniak's Polish translation*).

EXAMPLE 3

SOURCE

"*Caldes Dantiscanorum*" was written by Łasicki in Latin after the Battle of Lubieszów in 1577 then translated into Polish by Joachim Bielski in 1597, and then expanded and amended by Adam Karaś with a modern translation in 2016.

TITLE

Clades Dantiscanorum, anno Domini M D LXXVII, XVII Aprilis ...in qua caus[a] belli à serenissimo Rege Poloniae Stephano contra Gedanenses suscepti, referuntur ; Francofurti 1578 [Wechelus]

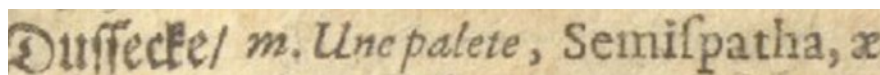
TRANSCRIPTION

Quibus aliquantisper resistantibus, monet Haidones moribudus ductor ipsorum vt, si vincere vellent, abiectis scolpis victoriam retardantibus, **acinacibus**, tecti capitasecuribus, rem cominus agerent.

TRANSLATION

When they have been defending for a while, the dying commander of the hajduks¹⁶ rebuked them that in order to prevail they must abandon their muskets, which only delay victory, but defend their heads with their war hammers (czekan) and shorten the distance, fighting a close battle with their short **sabres**.

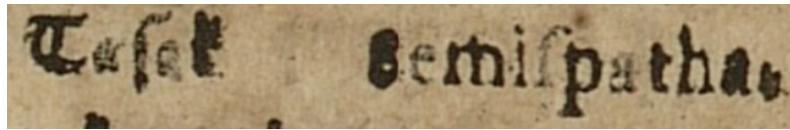
As the above examples show, the Latin term *acinacis*, as used in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, very precisely described an eastern type of sabre, otherwise known as a **curved sabre**, a **Persian sword** or a **Turkish sabre**. What would a dussack be, then? The majority of German-Latin dictionaries from the period translate dussack as SEMISPATHA.



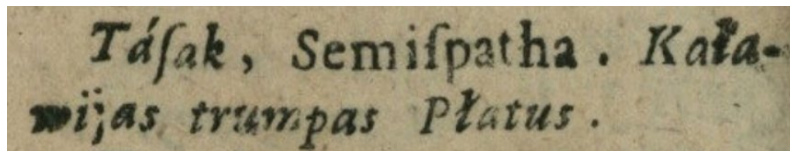
Johann Hermann Widerhold dictionary from 1669
Neues Teutsch-Frantzösisch-Lateines Dictionarium

¹⁵ Czeladź pocztowa. In the Polish cavalry a towarzyszy (a cavalry officer/knight) would have a few men (czeladź pocztowa) at his command (poczet was the smallest unit of the hussaria). These men would be subordinate to him, usually came from the lower classes, and would fight in the battle.

¹⁶ An infantry soldier, often a Hungarian in the Polish army.

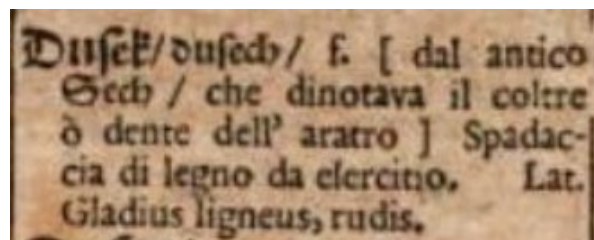


Elger Georg dictionary from 1683
Dictionarium Polono-Latino-Lothauicum



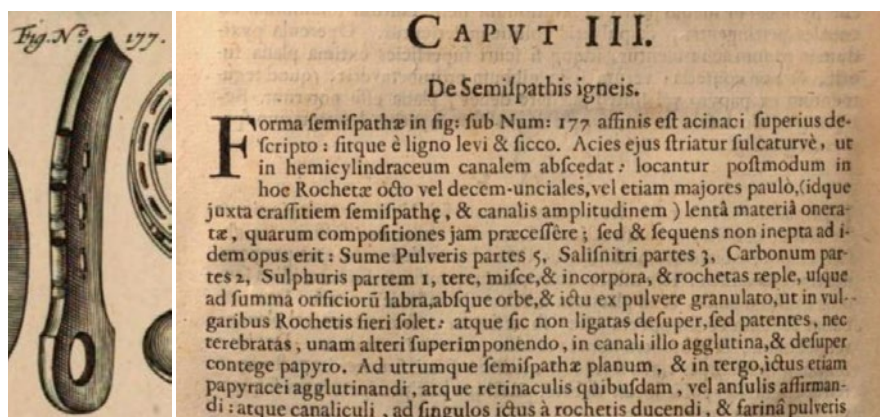
Szyrwid Konstanty (1579-1631) dictionary from 1677
Dictionarium trium lingvarum in usum studiosae iuventutis

MATTHIAS KRAMER'S dictionary and KAZIMIERZ SIEMIANOWICZ'S treatise both point to the fact that the Latin term *semispatha* is used to refer to a wooden training weapon found in the majority of German treatises.



Matthias Kramer dictionary from 1700 "*Das herrlich grosse deutsch-italiänische Dictionarium.*"

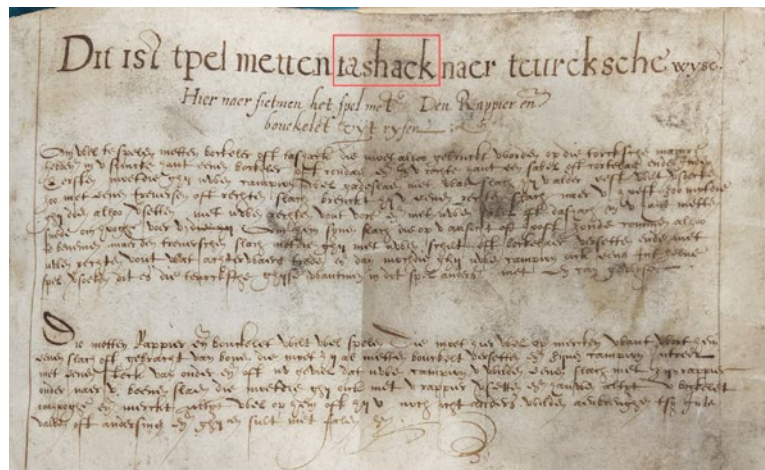
Transcription: *Dusek* - GLADIUS LIGNEUS – i.e. a wooden sword



Kazimierz Siemianowicz treatise from 1650 „*Artis Magnae Artilleriae pars prima.*”

What is interesting, the word *semispatha* does not actually occur in any fencing treatise of the period (that have been found so far) which would have been translated into or written in Latin. Considering that the treatises were written by highly qualified specialists, it is hard to believe that the authors would use imprecise language or incorrectly name the weapon whose use they were discussing.

An anonymous Dutch manuscript *Schermkunst* published in 1595 contains illustrations of Turkish warriors armed with sabres and shields (*pages 11 and 12*). In a short description of the illustrations, the author refers to the weapon portrayed as tashack (*dussack*). Later on, the author twice refers to the sabre (*sabel*) and dussack (*taschack*) as weapons with which you can perform the techniques described.



An anonymous Dutch manuscript *Schermkunst* published in 1595

Translation:

This is the play with the dussack after the Turkish manner.⁵

Afterwards the play with the rapier and buckler is presented. To play well with the targe¹⁰ or dussack they must be used thus in the Turkish manner, having in your left hand a targe or rotella and in your right hand a sabre or cutlass. And first you must observe your opponent well, [to see] what blow he wants to try against you first, whether with a reverse or [a] right blow. If he delivers you a right blow to your head, then you must parry it thus, with your right foot forwards and with your sabre or dussack in your hand with the edge upwards in front of you to take his blow that would [otherwise] come at your face or head from him. But the reverse blow you must parry with your shield or buckler, and step backwards somewhat with your right foot; and then you may also try your opponent in the same play. This is the Turkish way, for one cannot use them differently in this play.

⁵ Source: „Swordplay: an anonymous illustrated Dutch treatise for fencing with rapier, sword and polearms from 1595” Transcription, English translation and interpretation by Reinier van Noort.

We can observe a similar usage – when *sabre* and *dussack* are interchangeable – in MIKOŁAJA REY’S 1558 *Wizerunek własny żywota człowieka poczciwego* (*A Faithful Image of an Honest Man’s Life*), where the author uses a diminutive of the word *tesak*, that is *tesaczek*^{1-vii}, instead of the word *szabla* (‘sabre’). As Poles did not use wooden dussacks, and as steel dussacks (Western-European sabres) were incredibly rare, in the passage below Rey could have easily been referring to a cavalry sabre or a short sabre of an eastern type.

Transcription:

„Bo możesz ty sobie bez wszetecznego opilstwa albo nikczemnej biesiady zachowanie uczynić, jedno tesaczkiem gdy przed nimi sztukę nadobną wyprawisz, drugie też poskokiem, drugie też luteńką, a nawięcej wdzięcznymi rozmowami.”

Tranlation:

“You may fashion the best behaviour for yourself without wanton drunkenness or dishonourable talk – show them a graceful play of a tesaczek or a dance, or the strumming of a lute, and best of all – gentle conversation.” (Book 1, ch. 17)

The word **tesak** appears also in ŁUKASZ GÓRNICKI *Dworzanin Polski* (*The Polish Courtier*) from 1566:

Transcription:

„Dosyć na tym, iż jako dobry żołnierz umie kowalewi roskazać, jakim kształtem ten tesak i jako dobry ma być, który robić daje, a nie uczy go tego, jako gi robić, jako mu wiele stali dać, jako gi długo młotem kować.”

Tranlation:

“It is enough that, being a good soldier, he can tell the smith what shape of a tesak to fashion and how good it should be, but does not teach the smith his own craft, or how much steel to use or for how long to forge it, just leaves the smith to it.”

The manuscript on fireworks by Friedrich Meyer from 1594, entitled *Büchsenmeister- und Feuerwerksbuch*, has a chapter devoted to the production of a flaming sabre that would be used in various pyrotechnic displays (*Ein Brinnenden Säbel zuemachen*). In this chapter, both in text and in the illustrations, we can see a depiction of a Hungarian sabre (the most common type of sabre in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries). The illustration to the right of the sabre shows a wooden dussack. Since the dussack is included in a chapter on the sabre, it could point once again to the connection between the two weapons and could support the theory that dussack was a wooden trainer to learn sabre fencing.

^{1-vii} It is a peculiarity of Rey’s style that he uses a considerable number of diminutives for different, often quite surprising words. These are not just smaller versions of the object, but they make it more pleasing, more intimate and more endearing.



Hungarian sabre and dussack
Friedrich Meyer „Büchsenmeister- und Feuerwerksbuch” 1594.



Sabre according to Friedrich manuscript from 1594.

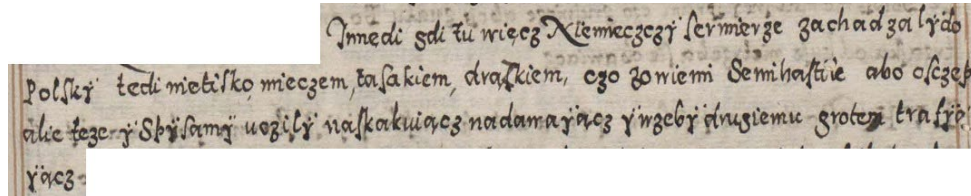
To sum up the argument so far and the collected evidence, we can assume that the dussack which we find in German treatises was a training tool intended to be used to practice fighting with either a sabre or its Western European equivalent.

This is supported by the following facts:

- The Latin term *acinacis* referring to a sabre in fencing treatises.
- The title and illustrations of Heinrich von Gunterrodt's chapter on Dussack and Sabre.
- The title and illustrations in the Dutch *Schermkunst* treatise on using Dussack in the Turkish style.
- The illustrations of Dussack and Sabre in the chapter on sabre in Friedrich Meyer's firework treatise.

If we assume the above theory to be correct, then each treatise describing the use of the dussack is in fact instructing also in the use of the sabre. This, to some extent, could explain why we have no Polish treatises devoted to the use of bladed weapons. If the art of fencing, particularly with the sabre/dussack, was so exhaustively treated in the German sources, there was no need to create additional publications.

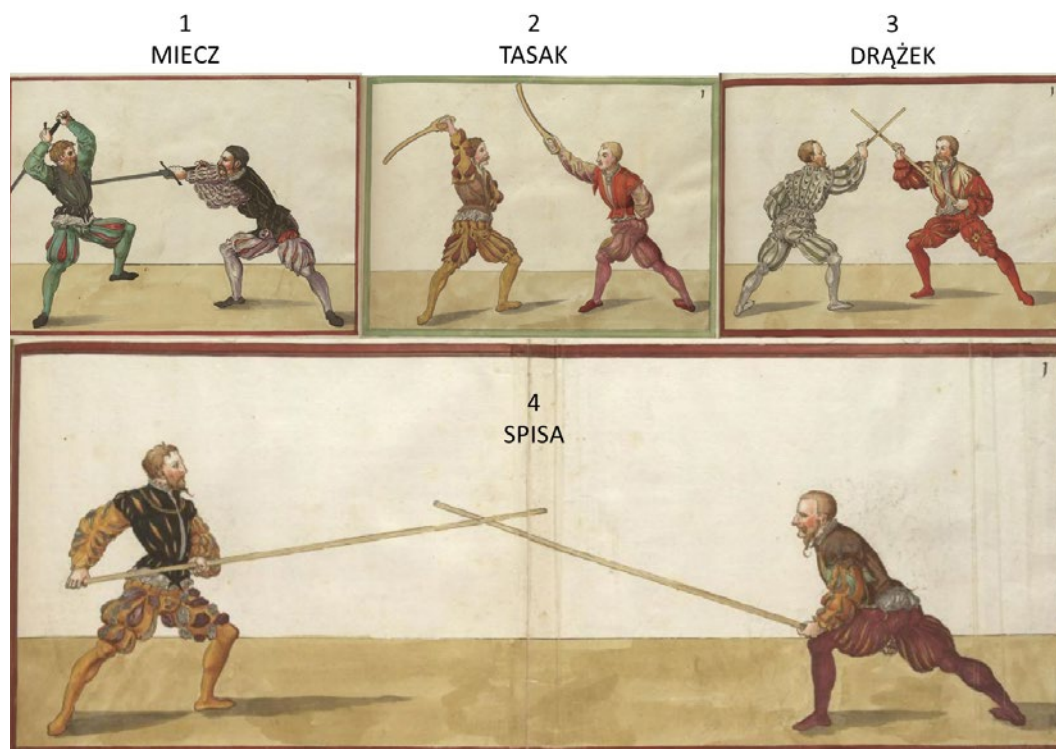
We know from Stanisław Sarnicki's *Księgi hetmańskie* ("The Hetman Books"), from 1577 that Poles used to learn fencing with bladed weapons (including dussack/tasack) from German fencers (among others).



Transcription: Inedy gdy tu więc niemieccy szermierze zachadzali do Polskiej, (Polski) tedy nie tylko mieczem, tasakiem, drażkiem, co zowiemy semihastile obo oszczep, ale teze i spisami uczyli naskakując, nadawając i w zęby drugiemu grotem trafiając.

Translation: Elsewhere, when German fencers visited Poland they instructed others in how to use a sword, a tasak, a staff (which we call semihastile or spear), but even a pike, jumping, giving more than they got, punching the other's teeth with the spearhead.

What is quite interesting, the order in which Sarnicki names these weapons matches perfectly the order found in Paulus Hector Mair's treatise written 33 years earlier:



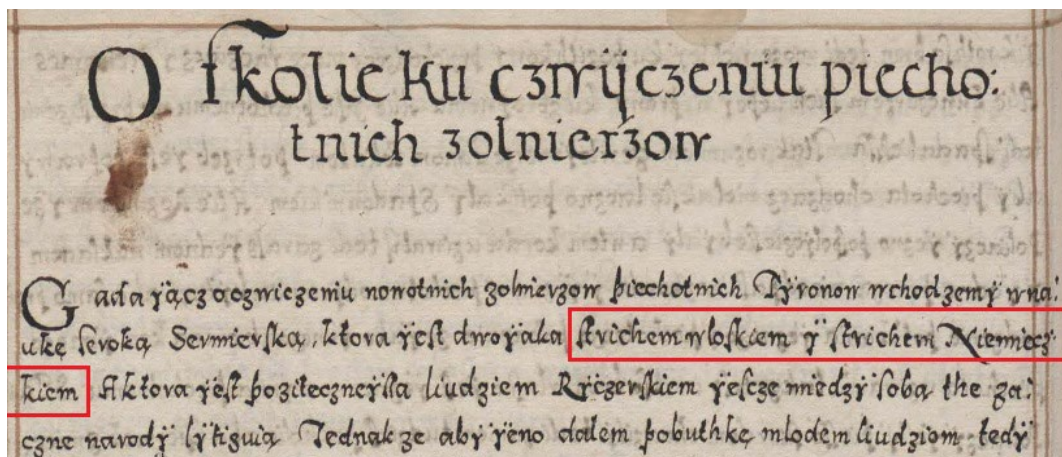
Schwert (MIECZ - SWORD) Duseggen (TASAK - DUSSACK) Stenglin (DRAŻEK - STAFF) Lange Spies (SPISA - LANCE/PIKE)

This order – quite astonishingly – is not shared by any other fencing treatise from that time. This could suggest that Sarnicki was exposed to Mair's work, for instance when he had been studying in Wittenberg.

OLD POLISH FENCING

In order to recreate the art of using weapons in old Poland, we need to analyse contemporary fencing systems. Fencing is a science devoted to the use of malee weapon, and despite differences in the physical construction of the weapon (as well as its main purpose and use), it is guided by a set of universal rules and principles. These principles underlie, among other things, the directions of cuts, the use of kinetic energy, the mechanics of leverage, the angles of the motion of both body and blade. This knowledge was created and refined over centuries, and kept changing in tune with the developments in protective equipment, military technology, and the realities of the battlefield. Thus, if we want to reconstruct the techniques of the use of these weapons, we need to relate them to the above-mentioned aspects in the context of a specific time and place.

Speaking of time, it is important to note that in the Renaissance period, it was the Italian and German states that were the main cultural centers of Europe. The biographies of Polish nobility of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries show us that many Poles were educated and trained in military matters and in the art of war at the universities in Rome, Naples, Padua, Wittenberg, Geneva, and others. It should not come as a surprise that during the Renaissance, **two main fencing schools – Italian and German** – reigned supreme in Europe, and therefore also in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. To provide more evidence for this theory, I would like to quote Stanisław Sarnicki and his *Księgi Hetmańskie* ('The Hetman Books') from 1577.



Transcription: „O szkole ku ćwiczeniu piechotnych żołnierzów.” «Gadając o ćwiczeniu nowotnych żołnierzów piechotnych, tironów (rekrutów) wchodzimy w naukę szeroką szermierską, która jest dwojaka: strichem (sposobem) włoskiem i strichem niemieckiem. A która jest pożyteczniejsza ludziem rycerskim, jeszcze między sobą te zacne narody litygują (sprzecają się)»”

Translation: „How to train infantry soldiers.” «Speaking of how to train new infantry soldiers, recruits, we must treat of the broader science of fencing, which comes in two different methods: the Italian method and the German method. And which one of these two is more useful to a knight? Well, the two worthy nations are still arguing about it.»

This quote clearly shows that in the Commonwealth, fencing exercises were taught according to the two different schools: Italian and German. It is worth mentioning that STANISŁAW SARNICKI himself studied in Königsberg, Wittenberg and Geneva, and the nomenclature he uses is largely drawn from both German and Italian.

NOTE

BARTOSZ PAPROCKI, in his *Herby Rycerstwa Polskiego* ("The Heraldic Arms of the Polish Knighthood") from 1581, presents an interesting anecdote on the fencing skills of a certain Polish nobleman by the name of Stanisław Dzierżanowski. We learn from it that Dzierżanowski, during his long sojourn in Italy, was greatly admired in one of the fencing schools there.

STANISŁAW brat ich piąty był mąż wielkiej siły i czerstwości; we Włoszech czas się długi bawił, w szkole szermierskiej wielką sławę odnosił, a potem od zazdrościwych Włochów zabity, które sobie lekce poważał, ufając zbyt niemu szczęściu swemu.

Translation: STANISŁAW, the fifth brother, was a man of great strength and vigour; he stayed for quite some time in Italy, and garnered great fame in a fencing school, and was later killed by the jealous Italians, as he underestimated them, trusting too much in his own good fortune."

We can also find confirmation that Poles drew on the fencing knowledge of Western masters in the writings of an Italian fencing master Francesco Fernando Alfieri. In his introduction to the chapter on using a greatsword (*Spadone*) he writes as follows:

Questo Nobile esercizio è molto frequentato nella mia Scuola da Signori Italiani, Polachi, Francesi, & Alemanni - e da altri riguardeuoli soggetti di diuerse Nationi e ciò lo fanno per acquistar la prestezza, e fortificarli con il corpo, e far l'agilità, e svegliare l'ingegno addormentato per natura;

Translation: This noble exercise is much frequented in my school by Italian, Polish, French, and German men, and other regarded subjects of diverse nations and whom do acquire the speed and fortification with the body, and make the agility, and rouse the intelligence adorned by nature."

STANISŁAW SARNICKI also writes on the use of swords by the Poles at the time:

piechota użiwami takze też inakże bron najsna jest rężnemu a yma piechotnemu S Targi Polaczcy i tacy pieszci skor dem chodzili tedi zamię tudzieł pacholec abo Giermek gmiczem sedł. Gals miecz uis zalsz mclama nad Spade yeno rem nietrzeba sie nazbił rozi. Siwaracz any czełho machacz Bo nloch sprzodku yeno poddaie zkiethka stichi yzamierza: nie a ustełue sie rad a Czicha y pślmue patrzi skathbi tego ego gmiczem pozicz Hgdi obacz y ze sie pacholek uracha gmiczem yumordue toś dopiero riko gnomi nan krasle prask gaskakuiacz bye yako ten ktori jest polkoczom y liekky A toś trzeba sie na osta: tek chowacz A wacz y tals punctem a miecełm mieczem narabiacz Bo zamierzajacz y nichley sie dwa razy uwa cha mlsely raso tenczo stichue Nten był Zmiezay ustarich Azé: mian ktori trwa dotich miasz ze wacz y pachmie amizely czieczem no fowaly Bo tak stichony trudney sie obronicz y wana byna skodlywsta stichora Elianus spominacz

Transcription: Starzy Poliaci jeśli pieszo z kordem chodzili, tedy za niemi tudzież pacholie abo giermek z mieczem szedł, gdyż miecz już zasię wiele ma nad spadę, jeno niem nie trzeba się nazbyt rozigrawać, ani często machać, bo Włoch z przodku jeno podaje z lekka sztychy i zamierzanie, a ustępuje się rad, a czyha a pilnuje, patrzy skąd by tego co z mieczem pożyć. A gdy obaczy, że się pacholek uwaha z mieczem i umorduje, toż dopiero jako znowu nań trzask prask zaskakując bije, jako ten który jest poskoczny i lekki. Atoż trzeba siłę na ostatek chować, a raczej też punctim, a nie cessim (pchnięciem a nie cięciem) mieczem narabiać, bo zamierzający rychlej się dwa razy uwaha, niżeli ten, co sztychuje. I ten był zwyczaj u starych Rzymian, który trwa dotychmiast, że raczej pachmie aniżeli cięciem bojowali, bo tak sztychowi trudniej się obronić i rana bywa szkodliwsza sztychowa.

Translation: The Old Poles, if they walked on foot and had a kord with them, a page or a squire would carry the sword for them, following behind. The sword, again, is better than a smallsword in certain ways, though you cannot get too enthusiastic or wave it about too often, because at the start the Italian will simply lightly thrust and calculate, and gladly retreat, and then wait his turn and guard himself and look how to defeat the one with a sword. And when he sees that the squire exhausts himself with the sword, that's when – wham, bam – he catches him unawares, hits swiftly, as one who is light and agile. That is why you need to retain your strength to the end, and when working with the sword, choose punctim [thrusts] rather than cessim [cuts], as the attacker is more likely to tire himself out twice over with the cuts, rather than with the thrusts. And that was the custom among the old Romans which lasts until today, that they chose to thrust rather than cut, as it is harder to defend against a thrust, and the wound is much graver.

A little later, Sarnicki continues by recounting an interesting anecdote.

Skordownikiem alie szpadownikiem mierzadze. Za Henryka niemalo bily Francuzowie w Krakowie ludzi poszkodzyli, az sie na nich potem opatrzyli bily ze smieczmi poczeli chodzic. Dopiero Francuzi zgslupiel bily Sablia test Wloska ego na obu

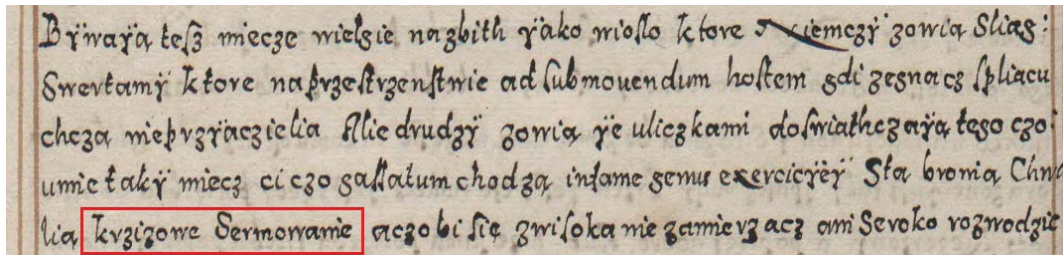
Transcription: Za Henryka (Króla Henryka III Walezego) niemalo beli Francuzowie w Krakowie ludzi poszkodzili, aże się na nich potem opatrzyli beli, (Polacy) że z mieczami poczęli chodzić. Dopiero Francuzi zgłupieli beli.

Translation: During the reign of Henry [King Henry III of France or Henryk Walezzy], the French have wounded many people in Kraków; the Poles learned from it and started carrying swords with them. And the French were so surprised they did not know what to do.



Servants or squires carrying a sword for their master. Illustrations from the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

What is interesting is that Sarnicki actually praises the cross-cutting art of fencing, when he speaks of the greatsword:



Transcription: Bywają też miecze wielgie nazbyt, jako wiosło, które Niemcy zowią Sliagwsertami (z niemieckiego „Schlachtschwert” lub szwedzkiego „Slagsvärd” tłum. miecz bitewny), które na przestrzeństwie ad submovendum hostem gdy zegnać z pliacu chcą nieprzyjaciela. Alie drudzy zowią je ulicznkami. Doświadczają tego co umie taki miecz, ci co gassatum chodzą infame genus exercitii (haniebne rzeczy czyniąc). Z tą bronią chwalią krzyżowe sermowanie (...).

Translation: There are also swords as great as an oar, that Germans call Sliagswert [from German Schlachtschwert or Swedish Slagsvärd], which, ad submovendum hostem [to remove the adversary] when they want to get rid of enemy on the battlefield out in the open. But others call these swords street-swords, as those who walk the gassatum [streets and alleyways] infame genus exercitii [performing vile acts], quickly learn what such a sword can do. With that weapon the cross-cutting art is particularly to be praised (...)

Analysing the historical techniques of the use of two-handed greatswords, such as the German *Schlachtschwert*, the Italian *Spadone* and the Iberian *Montante*, found in Barbaran (1528), Godinho (1599), Figueiredo (1651), Alfieri (1653), we can see the application of powerful and sweeping cross cuts. Together with Sarnicki's observations, it shows how crosscuts can be considered a universal fencing technique.

CROSS-CUTS

The Italian fencing master Marc'Antonio Pagano observed in the sixteenth century that Poles seemed to prefer cuts to thrusts. In his manual *Le tre giornate di Marc'Antonio Pagano* ("Three days of Marc'Antonio Pagano"), published in 1553, he remarks:

TRANSCRIPTION:

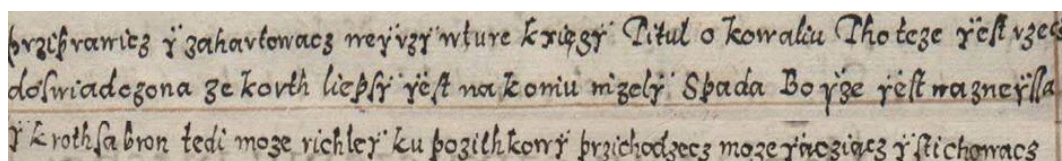
Apparver di poi i Germani con le lame lor corte et più nel taglio che ne la punta fondarono i lor colpi, sì come pur hoggi per militare et capital legge si vede ne la nation detta. Et questa oppinione nacque in loro nelle ristrette battaglie, havendo per fermo la lunghezza delle spade havrebbe potuto impedire gli andamenti che liberi stimavano dover'essere. Altrettanto fecero gli Ungheri, i Pollachhi et nationi particolari. Et così tutta l'Asia et l'Ethiopia si diedero al taglio et rimase questo osservato in fino ai nostri tempi.

TRANSLATION:

Then came the Germans with their short blades, who found their blows more in the cut than in the thrust, in the way even today you can see in this nation because of military and capital law. And this opinion generated in their close battle, keeping as a fix point that the length of their swords could have hurdled the movements, that should have been free, as they deemed to be. The same did the Hungarians, the Poles and other particular nations. And so all Asia and Ethiopia preferred the cut and this fact has been observed until our times.⁶

⁶Source: *Le tre giornate di Marc'Antonio Pagano Gentil'huomo napoletano. Dintorno alla disciplina de l'arme et spetialmente della spada sola*, a cura di Marco De Filippo, ed. Spring Edizioni (2015)

SARNICKI also seems to share this observation:



Transcription: To teze jest rzecz doświadczona, że kord lepszy jest na koniu niżeli spada, bo że jest ważniejsza i krótsza broń, tedy może rychlej ku pożytkowi przychodzić, może ją i ciąć i sztychować.

Translation: This is also an established fact that the kord* is better from horseback than a spada (sidesword), and as it is a weightier and a shorter weapon, it can be more quickly used depending on how the situation demands it, both for cuts and thrusts.”

Thus, cuts, and in particular cross-cuts, were an important element that distinguished the Old Polish art of fencing. The effectiveness of these cuts was commented upon by several western masters, and it is from these cross-cuts that the ‘CROSS-CUTTING ART’ has taken its name.

This term is described by the encyclopaedists and authors in the following ways:

Konstanty Gaszyński – Kontuszowe pogadanki (‘The Kontusz Conversations’), 1851
(a description of events from before 1756).

The best days, however, were Tuesdays and Thursdays as dies recreationis (‘days of recreation’). We would go out with the headmasters and ‘fathers’ to the banks of the Vistula close to Ujazdów, and there we would engage in play and games in the field. The younger ones would play palant (a baseball-like game), and the older ones would fight with palcaty (that is, wooden sticks), in a military fashion. In this way, a nobleman’s son would receive instruction in the cross-cutting art early on in his schooling days. It’s not surprising, then, that our nation was so famous for its sabre fencing, and always ready for a fight, when the exercising of knightly arts started so early in youth.

Konstanty Gaszyński – Reszty Pamiętników Macieja Rogowskiego Rotmistrza Konfederacji Barskiej
(‘Excerpts from the Memoirs of Maciej Rogowski, the Rotmistrz (‘commander’) of the Bar Confederation,’ 1847
(a description of events from before 1772).

Everything was done in a military fashion and every day we would train in the new German way, which was much appreciated by Puławski, and which he had us practise. And then Sulmirski, a burly brawler and an old veteran, started complaining under his breath that we have our own cross-cutting art and our Old Polish “load and kill”^{LVIII}, and we don’t need any of that German play and pageantry. When Puławski heard his mumblings, he berated him, saying: The Cross-cutting art? My dear brother, that was good in the old times, but now – when our enemies know a little more than we do, we need to learn their secrets so that we can match them in battles. – And besides, whether it’s good or not, this is my will. I do not wish to be a commander in name only, and those under my command must listen to me. – Upon hearing that, Sulmirski realised his mistake and stopped his complaints, asking the Marshall for forgiveness, and then he always trained with us the German ways, the three steps, and other new practices.

^{LVIII} An Old Polish saying, which had been previously used as a military command, particularly during uprisings.

Kazimierz Władysław Wójcicki – Zarysy domowe ('Home stories'), 1842

(a description of events after 1772). Either fictional or a written down verbal account.

Pan¹⁴⁹ Roch stepped forth, they started fencing, and just before, the master of the house had told them to put on wooden masks and gloves. The Frenchman accepted, but Pan Roch said: to the altar, and to the sabre, always go with an uncovered face! After a few exchanges, the Frenchman pressed the attack, and then Pan Roch, using the cross-cutting art, returned it back, and lo! he cuts. The Frenchman's sabre fell out of his hand and then he received such a cut across his mask that he fell onto the floor unconscious. Then Pan Roch, sheathing back his Augustan sabre, twirled his moustache and said: The Frenchie is on the floor, though God knows I have not taken any lessons and my father never had to waste his money.

Kazimierz Władysław Wójcicki – Zarysy domowe ('Home stories'), 1842

(events from the second half of the 18th century). Either fictional or a written down verbal account.

"And you (then he approached Jakób and slapped him on the arm), my old servant, you will care for my boy, you will teach him how to ride a horse, and shoot well, and fight with the cross-cutting art, since you're so skilled at it." Jakób started crying aloud, squeezed Kościesz' knees, and with true joy ran into his room. There, above the bed, hung an old karabela sabre. He took it off the wall, unsheathed it and kissed the chipped steel, and with tears in his eyes called: "You will not rust on the wall, I will teach a young boy how to use you, and I'll teach him well. And you, boy, you must be born, as I am already waiting for you, and my master has never broken his word. He promised me that there will be a boy here, for horse and for sabre, and he'll make good on it."

And every day, Jakób polished the karabela that he was going to use to teach the cross-cutting art to the young master.

Józef Dunin Karwicki – Szkice obyczajowe i historyczne ('Remarks on manners and history'), 1882

(a description of events between 1802 and 1804).

Rev. Józef knew of what happened, as it was such an unusual and famed event that it only took one morning for the news to travel throughout Warsaw and reach Blacha. He smiled and told Michał: If you're so brave, don't lose motivation and vigour, I will give you a note for my old friend, a famous brawler, who will surely help you out of your troubles. And indeed, he wrote a few words to Kamiński, who had a nickname Grumpy, an old Polish soldier, a famed brawler, who used the mill and the cross-cutting art, with two sabres in two hands.

Kamiński, listened to Michał's story with attention, calmed him down and said that the two of them would without a doubt be able to handle these seventeen Germans, as he had to deal with far worse in his life, during different sejmiks and forays, both in the Polish kingdom and in Lithuania, and that somehow, through all these troubles, with the protection of the Holy Virgin, he remained unscathed, and that he trusts today, that the Queen of Heavens, and the Protectress of the Polish Kingdom, will assure victory to both of them over these 'Pantyhoes'! "Because, sir, as you see, I know how to fight, and there is nothing better in the world than the mill and the cross-cutting art, which blinds the opponent and takes away his courage."

He sent him swiftly back to Rev Józef, asking only that he would lend his own cavalry school next to the palace at Blacha as the setting for the duel. He himself, as a second, spoke to the seventeen Prussian officers, informing them that the duel would take place the next morning in the palace's cavalry school, where he and the castellan's son will wait at the appointed hour in the name of honour. The officers were dumbfounded and could not initially comprehend that all seventeen of them were supposed to fight against just two; but that was a clear requirement of the duel, and the officers were to be seconds to each other. They considered it an ill-devised prank and waited for the resolution. But when the next morning the officers went into the school, they were immediately set upon by old Kamiński with a sabre in each hand with such impetus that Michał Brzostowski barely had time to unsheathe his own blade, when Kamiński jumped into the fray, whirling with the mill and his most favoured cross-cutting art, attacking one and the other, never letting them gather their wits, and immediately he cut some of them considerably, and caused them such fright that they fled in panic.

¹⁴⁹ Polish title and term of address for the nobility, roughly equivalent to Sir.

Encyklopedia Powszechna Tom ósmy S. Orgelbrand Warszawa 1861

General Encyclopaedia, vol. 8, by S. Orgelbrand, Warsaw 1861

“In the old days, Poles, who used only such weapons as are designed for cutting, had tremendous skill both on the battlefield, and in individual combat, which so often occurred at gatherings and brawls during various diets, and hardly ever did they go into such subtle techniques as the Germans do, instead basing their entire fencing art on the art of cross-cutting, that is on two quick successive cuts that went in a cross-wise fashion, from left diagonally to the right, and the other way round.”

Encyklopedia Powszechna Tom szesnasty S. Orgelbrand Warszawa 1864

General Encyclopaedia, vol. 16, by S. Orgelbrand, Warsaw 1864

“The Cross-cutting art – this is how the nobles of Old Poland named the skillful cuts with a saber. (...) Anyone who knew the cross-cutting art well was esteemed and respected by his fellow noblemen: the skill and agility of those fierce fighters was always something to be admired. Often, if two such formidable fencers stood back to back and defended against the oncoming rabble, they could fight their way through the throng, and escape with little harm to themselves. The tradition of the cross-cutting art, which was known even not so long ago amongst the legionnaires who served in the army of the Duchy of Warsaw, is now entirely lost.”

Podręcznik szermierczy i krótki opis szabli polskiej.

A Fencing Manual and a Short Description of the Polish Sabre, Karol Bernolak, Przemyśl, 1898.

“The Polish style of fencing differed in many ways from those found in western Europe, and though it did not concern itself with the subtle rules of German, French, or Italian fencing, it nonetheless had its own principles which made it separate. This was primarily seen in the art of the cross-cutting, that is, two quick subsequent cuts diagonally from left to right, and then the other way round. Polish fighters had such skill and endurance, proven time and again with this art, that the western fencers were often left astounded.”

Historia i psychologia szermierki,

History and Psychology of Fencing, Aleksander Raciborski, 1894.

“The often-mentioned ‘Cross-Cutting Art’ was, it seems, just a quickly repeated succession of cuts, maybe similar to those cuts taught in the Austrian cavalry these days.”

Encyklopedia Staropolska,

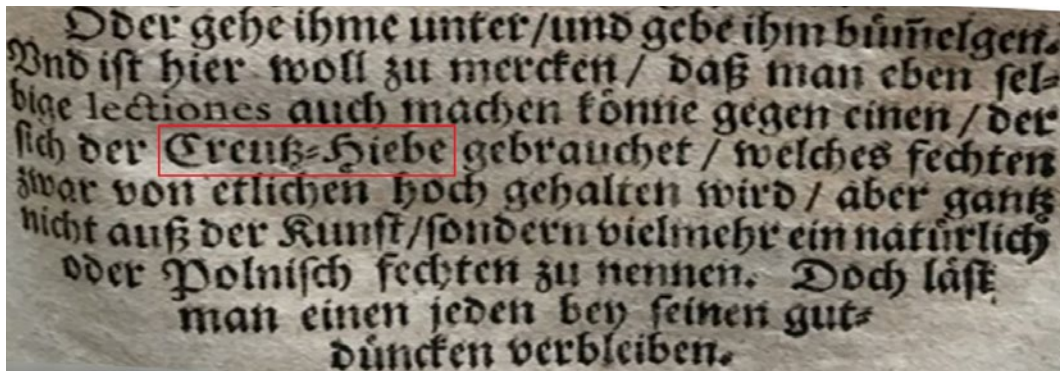
Zygmunt Gloger, Warszawa 1900-1903) [Old Polish Encyclopaedia, Zygmunt Gloger, Warsaw 1900-1903]

“Fencing, from German fechten ‘to fight’, in Polish szermierka. After the curved saber became widespread in Poland, we developed a style of fencing that was the most famous style in the world. Poles became so incredibly skilled at fencing with a curved saber that no other nation in the world could match them in this art. They called it the cross-cutting art because cuts and parries were formed in the shape of the cross.”

One of the criticisms put forth quite often is that ‘The Cross-Cutting Art’ is something that has been invented by the nineteenth-century authors, chroniclers, and encyclopaedists. The following sources suggest that this theory is incorrect:

- The quote from Hetman Books (1574), about the use of greatswords
- The memoirs of Konstanty Gaszyński, describing events in which his father Antoni took place, from before 1756
- The excerpts from the memoirs of Maciej Rogowski that describe events from the second half of the eighteenth century
- The memoirs of Józef Dunin Karwicki about Michał Brzostowski, which describe events from 1802-04
- The passage (found below) from the treatise of a Prussian fencing master Erhardus Henning from 1658, currently in the library in Frombork.

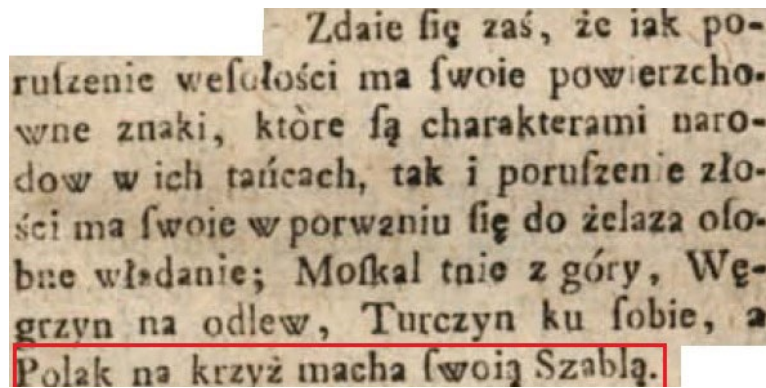
Henning, in his treatise on the art of cut-based fencing *Kurtze jedoch gründliche Unterrichtung vom Hieb- und fechten* from 1658, clearly states that fighting by using cross-cuts (*Creuz-hiebe*) is also called ‘natural’ or ‘Polish’ fencing.



TRANSLATION: And here must be noted well that one can also make these same lessons against someone who uses the Cross-cuts, which fight is indeed held high by some, but is not at all from the art, but can much more be named a natural or Polish fight. However, one lets everyone remain as he sees fit.

This passage clearly and unequivocally shows that cross-cutting was a characteristic feature of Polish fencing. Considering the content and context of the above passage, one would be tempted to say that in the second half of the seventeenth century, cross-cuts were starting to be seen as a relic of an ancient way of fencing that was still used by the ‘old-fashioned’ Poles. This would also explain the rhetoric found in the nineteenth-century texts, where the cross-cutting art was often attributed to parochial conservatives and old veterans.

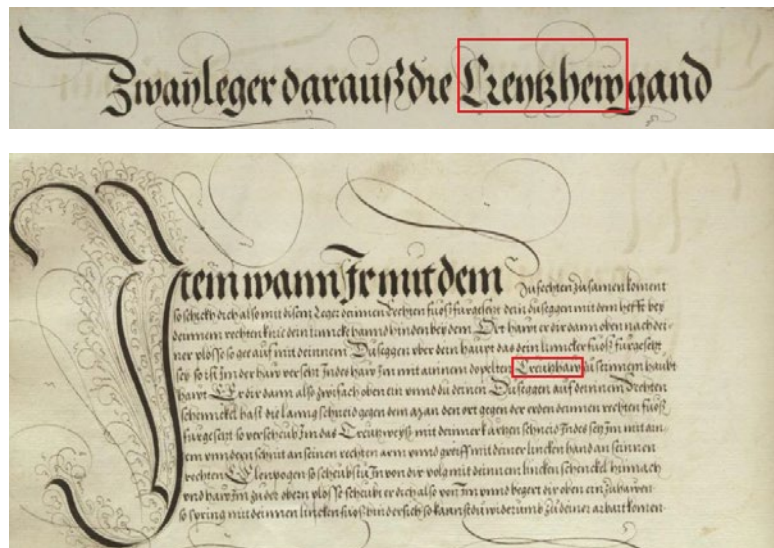
Father Franciszek Salezy Jezierski’s words from his posthumously published dictionary titled *Niektóre wyrazy porządkiem abecadla zebrane y stosownemi do rzeczy uwagami obiasnione* (‘Some Words Collected According the Order of the Alphabet and Explained with Appropriate Comments’) from 1791, in the entry on ‘Sabre’, seem to echo Henning’s observations.



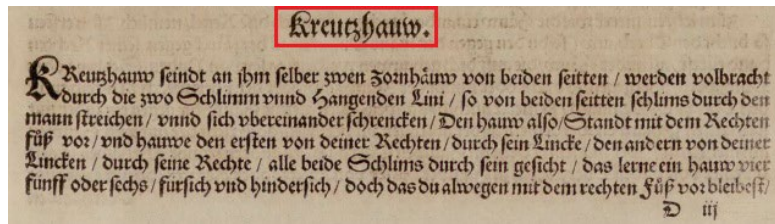
Transcription: „Zdaie się zaś, że iak poruszenie wesółości ma swoje powierzchowne znaki, które są charakterami narodow w ich tańcach, tak i poruszenie złości ma swoje w porwaniu się do żelaza osobne włdanie; Moskal tnie z góry, Węgrzyn na odlew Turczyn ku sobie, a Polak na krzyż macha swoją Szablą.”

Translation: It seems that, just as merriment has its own outward ways of expression, where the national character is exhibited in various dances, so the movements resulting from anger influence the ways one uses steel. The Hungarian cuts from the left, the Muscovite from above, the Turk towards himself, and the Pole uses cross-cuts with his Sabre.

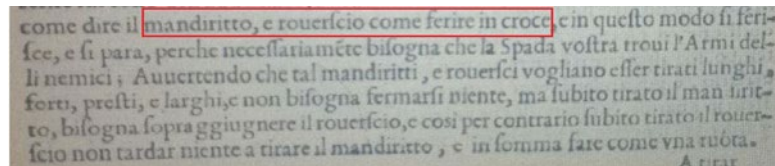
But what are cross-cuts? To answer this question, I will showcase passages and descriptions from various manuscripts from sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which describe this fencing action in more detail.



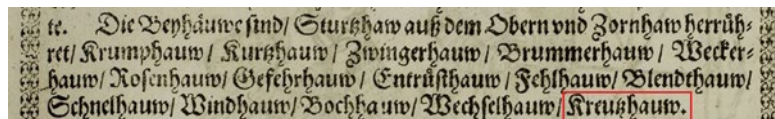
Paulus Hector Mair [Creuzhaw] 1540



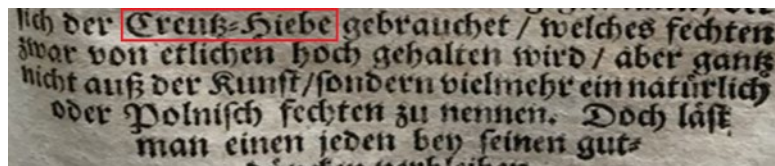
Joachim Meyer [Kreutzhaw] 1570



Nicoletto Giganti [Mandritto e Roverscio] 1608



Jakob Sutor [Kreutzhaw] 1612



Erhardus Henning [Creutz-Hiebe] 1658

Cross-cuts (**Kreutzhaw**) are described by the German fencing master JOACHIM MEYER⁷ in 1570 as follows:

Cross Cut [Kreutzhaw]⁷

The Cross Cuts are essentially two Wrath Cuts from both sides; they are executed through the two diagonal and downward angled lines, that are struck through the opponent diagonally from both sides, and crossed over one another. Strike it thus:

Stand with your right foot forward, and strike the first from your right through his left, the second from your left through his right, both diagonally through his face; *learn this one cut to four, five, or six, forward and back, but such that you always remain with the right foot forward; therefore when you wish to step, then gather yourself with the rear foot, so that you can step forward with the right; then you shall at the least always have *one step for both cuts, that are struck from both sides through the Cross.

⁷Source: "Joachim Meyer, Book 2 part 1: The Dusack (1570)" by Joachim Meyer, Jeffrey L. Forgeng (Translator)

In a similar vein (though in more detail), NICOLETTO GIGANTI describes cross-cuts (**mandritto o roverscio come ferire in croce**) in 1608:

„In order to both attack and defend, I want you to keep your sword high as if to deliver a mandritto. If both thrust at you simultaneously, you should cut a mandritto into their swords, followed by a roverscio.

The mandritto should be delivered so it almost wounds your enemy's neck, and finishes ready to attack again from the left. In this manner the mandritto has two effects, it offends and protects at the same time. Having delivered the mandritto you should bring your body and foot back, put the sword under your left arm ready for the roverscio, then quickly execute this roverscio as follows. It should begin by attacking your opponent's neck, and end once more on your right side.

The mandritto and roverscio therefore attack in the form of a cross. With this method you both attack and defend, since your sword must inevitably find your enemies weapons. Note that the mandritti and roversci should be delivered long, hard, quickly and without ever stopping. As soon as you perform the mandritto the roverscio should follow. Likewise having delivered the roverscio, you should execute the mandritto without any delay. In other words they should continue like a wheel.

To perform these sorts of cuts, you must exercise by delivering mandritti and roversci to condition your arm and quicken your legs, training by executing two or three hundred cuts, and just as many roversci, without stopping. In this manner anyone can parry thrusts, even from three or four opponents, while wounding and keeping the enemy at bay to the full length of their sword, by delivering long, quick, strong and wide cuts.”⁸

We can conclude from these passages that cross-cuts need to be performed high (*from the shoulder*), strong and fast, so that the weapon moves in a sweeping and fluid motion. Note also that Paulus Hector Mair, Joachim Meyer, Jakob Sutor, Nicoletto Giganti, and Giovanni Alberto Cassani all suggest using this type of cut in order to deflect and defend against the enemy's weapon.

Cross-cuts are, in their essence, a combination of cuts that perform two functions at the same time – they are both defensive and offensive. They can wound the opponent directly or deflect the weapon. When they are performed with maximum force, they necessitate a turn of the hips and trunk. What is particularly interesting is a description of combinations of diagonal cuts which we find in *Essercito Militare...*, a treatise by Giovanni Alberto Cassani from 1603. Cassani, in the chapter ‘On Fencing’, outlines a simple system based on two intersecting circles that create four diagonal cuts. Techniques suggested by Cassani rest on combining cuts, where the first cut of the combination is supposed to deflect the enemy's weapon, and the second is supposed to hit the target. The author also recommends attacking with a passing step, beginning the movement with the left leg.

ON FENCING

*In fencing there are two arcs, or rather circles, the dritto and the roverscio.
These are divided into four simple blows⁹:*

SOTTO (*right diagonal from the bottom*)

RISOTTO (*left diagonal from the bottom*)

SOPRA (*right diagonal from the top*)

RISOPRA (*left diagonal from the top*)

⁸ Source: *The ‘Lost’ Second Book of Nicoletto Giganti (1608): A Rapier Fencing Treatise* by Nicoletto Giganti, Piermarco Terminiello (Translator), Joshua Pendragon (Translator). ⁹ Source: „Brief notes on fencing, from the military treatise of Giovanni Alberto Cassani (1603)” by Piermarco Terminiello

Whereas there are twelve composite blows:

SOTTO & RISOPRA	SOPRA & RISOPRA	SOTTO & SOPRA
RISOPRA & SOTTO	RISOPRA & SOPRA	SOPRA & SOTTO
RISOTTO & SOPRA	SOTTO & RISOTTO	RISOTTO & RISOPRA
SOPRA & RISOTTO	RISOTTO & SOTTO	RISOPRA & RISOTTO

ATTACKING WITH TWO STEPS

To employ these said blows, both simple and composite, you should (in my view) perform them with two steps, starting with your left, before quickly returning back with the same two steps you attacked with. You should employ neither more nor fewer steps in defence, never turning your back on your enemy.

With the simple blows, they should accompany your steps in twos: two forward and two back, as I described above. This is because on your first step, which is always performed with your left foot, you should beat your enemy's sword. With your second step, passing your right foot forward, you should attack your enemy.

You should then quickly return back, with the same sequence of two steps you attacked with. During this retreat you should take care only to defend, and not attack. Again be advised never to turn your back on your enemy while withdrawing.

ATTACKING WITH THREE STEPS

To attack with three forward steps, again you should defend on retreating, in the same sequence of three steps, not withdraw with fewer or more steps than you used in attack, never turn your back on your enemy, and as before parrying while you take the three steps back.

The three steps you perform forward in attack should start with your right foot, not with your left as described during the attack with two steps.

The blows you should deliver during attacks with three steps are the following:

SOPRA, RISOPRA & SOPRA	SOTTO, RISOTTO & SOTTO
RISOPRA, SOPRA & RISOPRA	RISOTTO, SOTTO & RISOTTO

Otherwise with the four simple blows described above, one at a time.

ATTACKING WITH ONE STEP

You can also attack your enemy with one step at a time, employing the two arcs, or rather circles I mentioned at the beginning: the dritto and the roverscio. You can advance and withdraw as you please, as the opportunity presents itself.

In this manner all the blows, whether simple, that is one at a time, or composite with two or three in a row, should finish with the right foot forward and not the left. Then you should retreat with the same sequence of steps you used to attack the enemy, not taking more or fewer.

Always study the enemy in order to oppose him with the said attacks, or alternatively with the same blows he uses, but in the right tempo, so that as one finishes the other begins.

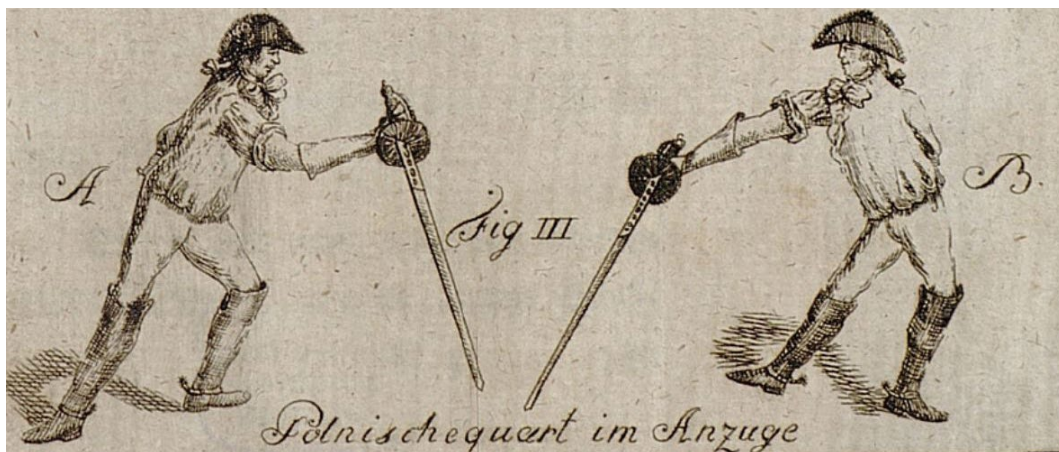
Cassani's treatise is an excellent source of information on military fencing from the beginning of the seventeenth century, even though it is mostly concerned with the art of war and infantry training. Cassani, as one of the few authors of the time, recommends the use of simple combinations of diagonal cuts, including cross-cuts, considering them to be a key skill of a good soldier.

From the sources above we can clearly see that cross-cutting was a key characteristic of the Old Polish way of fencing. Could we then go further and say that we, as Poles, have created a unique art of using the weapon? It is difficult to answer the question either way... Though the Poles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries clearly preferred this technique, it does not mean that they had invented it, or that they restricted themselves to it exclusively. Cross-cuts are just one of the many techniques of a broad repertoire available to a fencer, whether they fence with a sabre, a sword, or a different weapon. This technique in isolation cannot be seen as a separate and distinct martial art form, though it may very well add a specific style or flavour. To better illustrate this phenomenon, let us consider the following: though we have the Russian, American, or Polish schools of boxing, it does not mean that each one is a separate martial art. Each one of these styles shares the same punches, dodges, and steps, though they may differ in what methods they choose, which techniques they select from a broader repertoire, and how they conceptualise the fight. The different schools of fencing that characterised specific nations could be seen in a very similar way – the Muscovite cuts from above, the Hungarian from the left, the Turk towards himself, and the Pole uses cross-cuts. This means that in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, cross-cuts may have been a very common technique whose effectiveness marked Poles apart from other nations, creating that ‘national’ character. We need to remember, however, that the cross-cuts were just a small part of a much broader art of fencing.

THE TURKISH CUT

When we analyse the passages treating of Polish fencing from western manuals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, we have to mention the cut that was typically called the POLISH FOURTH (*Polnische Quart*) by the German fencing masters. From the late eighteenth century onwards, this cut found its way into a range of German manuals devoted to cut-based fencing. The Polish Fourth gained ill fame (almost to the point of becoming a legend), mostly due to the areas it targeted – the groin, the underbelly, and the underside of the forearms – and also because it was so effective and difficult to parry.

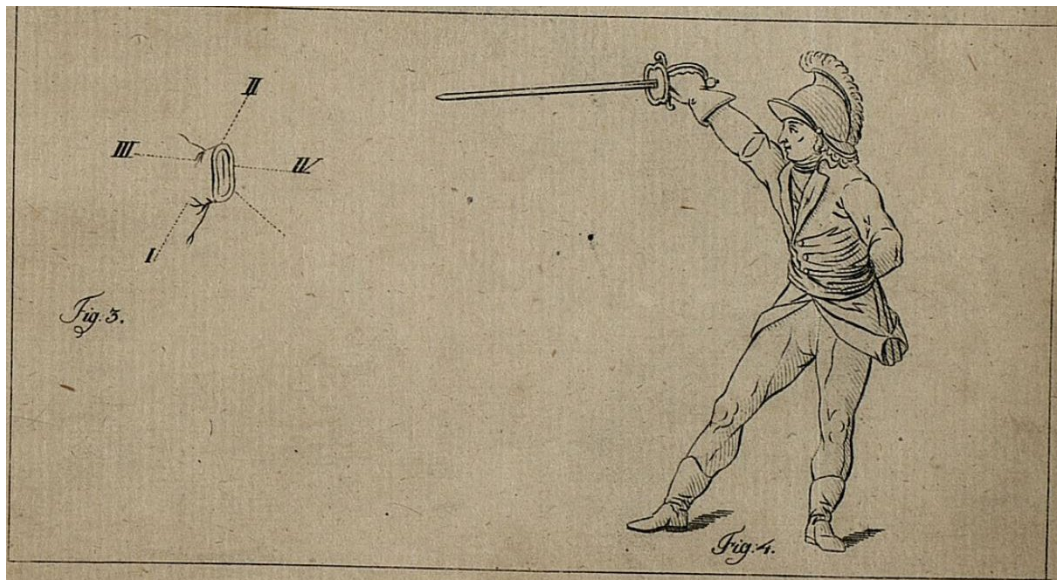
THE POLISH FOURTH is described by the fencing masters in the following way:



Friedrich Leopold Behr – *Flüchtige Bemerkungen über die verschiedene Art zu fechten einiger Universitäten*. 1791r.

The Polish Quart (*TAB. III. Fig. 3 A.*), which will be delivered from the lowest inner (*i.e. next to the vertical line*) place of the Quart, so that the point of the sabre is floating just above the ground, and then it will cut through the “shame limbs” (*i.e. penis and testicles*), and the lower belly. This is a hit which is highly dangerous for both the parts (*fighters?*); then when the

opponent with his usual first parry (*Primparade*) will quickly intercept it (*i.e. parry*) (*vid. Tab. III Fig. 3. B.*), so that the consequent hit (*i.e. the attacker's one*) is very difficult to parry, since the upper body is given to the blow (*i.e. it is open for the blow*). So these will be the hits and their parries. Which are really not like the hits to the face, indeed they (*the Quart hits*) are excellent to be hated in the Academies, (*the students call them the malice hits*), because it can be earned (*i.e. successful*) with the unluck of the others, since it is often dependent on the timing Good (*i.e. on the time choice*); and it is known that nobody with a noble thinking would ever make it. In the same way Khan, Haspelmacher and other famous fencers say that it is completely an innocent thing (*i.e. the cut, hit*).¹⁰



Johann Adolph Karl Roux - *Grundliche und vollständige Anweisung in der deutschen Fecht-Kunst auf Stoss und Hieb* 1798

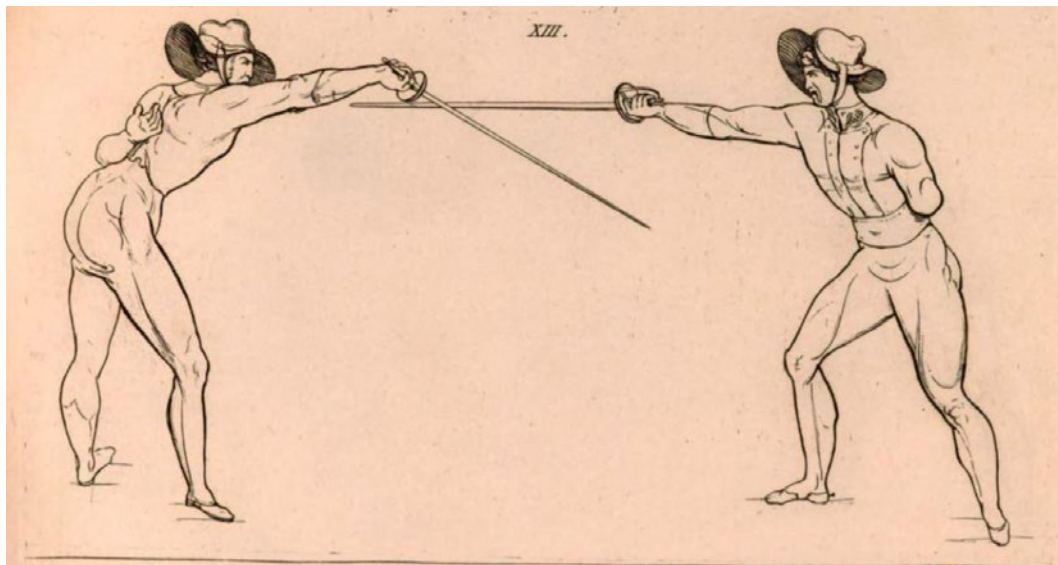
No. IV. Here we move the joint and the blade to his right in an angle, and throw it against die inner side of the enemy's arm or breast. We can call this blow the full, inward, or also the Angled Quart, and to diferentiate it from the Quart-Coupè, or the so called Polish Quart, the line of which is described without number under No. IV, and which, as the previous one, even if it is thrown from the floor to the lower body, or inward to the lower part of the enemy's arm, while indeed you move backwards with the covered Quart, so that the point of the attacks (*Hieber*) dangles over the floor in upthrowing ready position."

3.) Die polnische Quart, die nach der 'untern Seite des Arms und nach dem Unterleibe gehet, ist unter die nachtheiligsten Hiebe zu rechnen.

Johann Adam Karl Roux - *Theoretisch praktische Anweisung über das Hiebfechten* 1803¹²

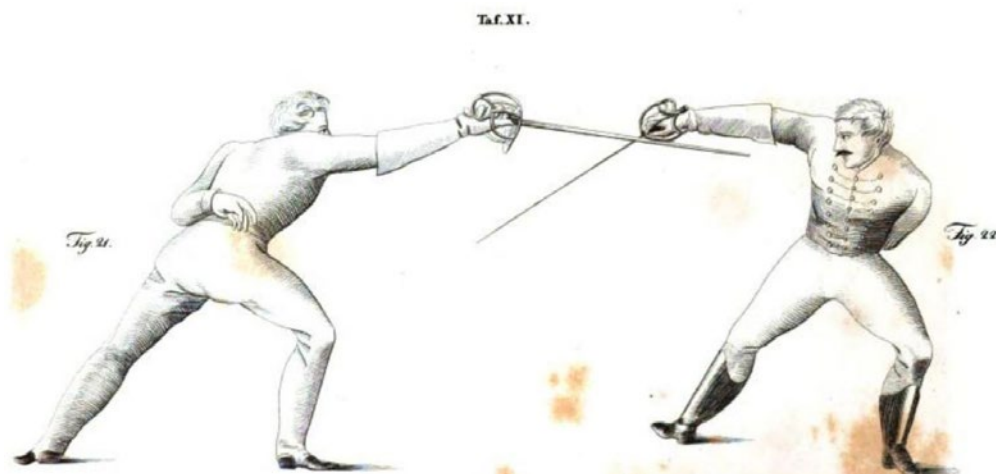
Translation: *The Polish Quart, which from the lower part of the arm goes through the lower part of the body (i.e. abdomen), is to count among the most harmful/desrespectful blows*

¹⁰ Source: "Flüchtige Bemerkungen über die verschiedene Art zu fechten einiger Universitäten. 1791r." by Friedrich Leopold Behr, Ruben Ragno (Translator), Luca Basile (Translator); ¹¹ Source: "Grundliche und vollständige Anweisung in der deutschen Fecht-Kunst auf Stoss und Hieb 1798r." by Johann Adolph Karl Roux, Ruben Ragno (Translator), Luca Basile (Translator); ¹² Source: "Theoretisch praktische Anweisung über das Hiebfechten 1803r." by Johann Adam Karl Roux, Ruben Ragno (Translator), Luca Basile (Translator);



Johann Adolf Ludwig Werner - *Versuch einer theoretischen Anweisung zur Fechtkunst im Hiebe - Mit 20 erläuternden Kupfertafeln* 1824

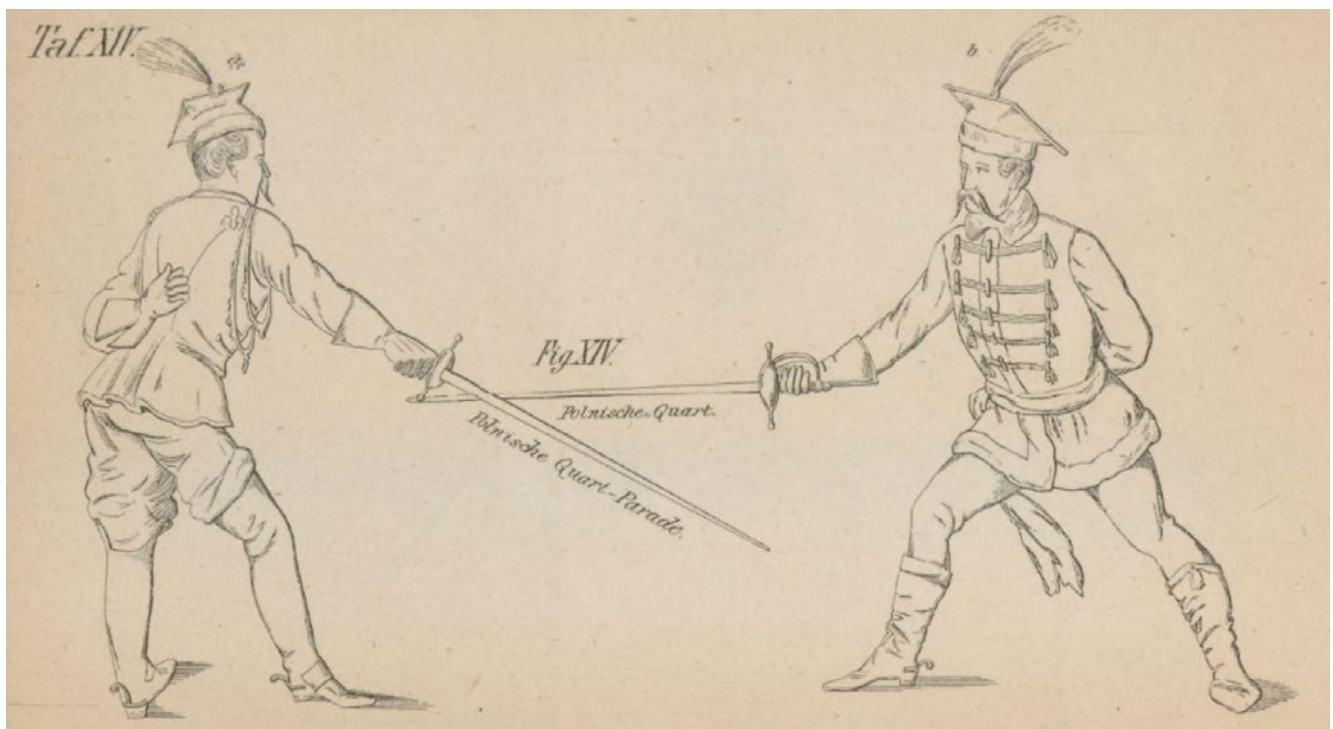
The Polish, or called Hellish Quart (*Tab. XIII. Fig. 1.*). This lays opposite to the steep Third (*Tërze*), and so describes the same line, as the half and inner Second, only with the difference, that the blow is thrown in the Quart movement (*Motion*), from the right to the left side from below up. This blow is almost the most difficult among all, since in this it requires the most uncomfortable torsione of the feest. It's useful excellently against opponents, that care to lay backwards with the upper body, because it's usual to receive blows in that part of the body. It is armful (*the blow*) if it will be delivered in multiple times, because the inner side of the fencer (*i.e. opponent*) will appear in full opening.¹³



Roux Friedrich August Wilhelm Ludwig - *Anweisung zum Hiebfechten mit geraden und krummen Klingen* 1840

The Polish Quart (*Fig. 21.*), which goes more from below upwards, close to the vertical direction, as the First (*Prim*) through the lower part of the Arm and the lower part of the body. One of the most dangerous blows..¹⁴

¹³ Source: "Versuch einer theoretischen Anweisung zur Fechtkunst im Hiebe - Mit 20 erläuternden Kupfertafeln 1824r." by Johann Adolf Ludwig Werner, Ruben Ragno (Translator), Luca Basile (Translator); ¹⁴ Source: "Anweisung zum Hiebfechten mit geraden und krummen Klingen 1840r." by Roux Friedrich August Wilhelm Ludwig, Ruben Ragno (Translator), Luca Basile (Translator)



Ignaz Bernhard Montag – *Neue praktische Fechtschule auf Hieb und Stoss* 1868

Polish Quart, (the so called) fig. XIV. b, which is difficult to execute and requires the most demanding training of all the cuts, which from the guard so as the Bogen will be delivered as a Second-Cut but not thrown from our right side down through the lower body of the opponent (as a Second-Cut), in which you move your front foot to the left of the cutting line to the outside of the opponent, and the body must be put someway bent backwards, concave in respect of the Cross, so that the cut is not blocked in its full swing by our front foot, and lastly to be wounded by a sharp weapon and giving our whole body as a prize to the enemy. - This hit introduces also the structure of the Quart Coupè, when, instead of hitting the opponent's lower body, so it will hit the shoulder from below, nearby where the hair grows (i.e. the armpit). These cuts are never used as Attack blow (i.e. first intention) against a rushing enemy, instead only as a second or double hit. To counter these the same parries are valid (i.e. are used) and afterblows as for the Second-Cut.¹⁵

The origin of the HELLISH POLISH FOURTH (*Die Höllische Polnische Quarte*), though, is not entirely without question, and we may find that its roots are not in the Commonwealth, but in the Ottoman Empire.

MICHAŁ STARZEWSKI, a Polish fencing master, makes an important point on the nature of this cut - *O Sermierstwie* ('On Fencing'), c.1830:

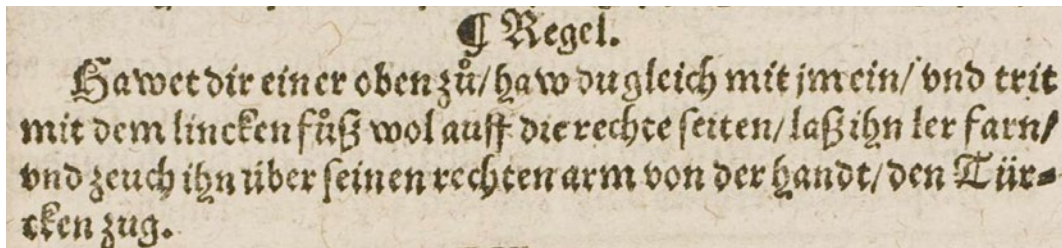
Transcription: Tu odwijasz kordem i rad byś razić go cięciem tamtemu przeciwnem; toczysz więc cięciem niskiem, tu od prawego w brzuch – cięcie też to nosi nazwę – nyżkiem. Cięcie to u nas zwane tureckie bośmy niegdyś Turkom najczęściej płatali nim brzuch.(...) Rzadko też Niemiec - tedy jechał kordem, a odniósł w upominku prawie zawsze cięcie to, ztąd też nyżek ten u nich ze zgrozą Die Höllische Polnische Quarte zwan.

Translation: Then, you move your weapon in an opposite fashion – so you use a low cut, that is from the right and below, into the stomach – and this cut is known as low-cut [nyżek]. This cut has occasionally been called among us the Turkish cut, because we would cut the bellies of the Turks open using this cut (...) Sometimes, a German would come here with his own weapon – and would almost always receive as a souvenir this cut, and so, in trepidation, they named our low-cut *Die Höllische Polnische Quarte* [The Hellish Polish Fourth].

¹⁵ Source: "Neue praktische Fechtschule auf Hieb und Stoss 1868r." by Ignaz Bernhard Montag, Ruben Ragno (Translator), Luca Basile (Translator)

Starzewski, describing the *nyżek* or a low-cut, or the Polish Fourth, makes a point that this used to be called the Turkish cut. He suggests that the origin of the term lies in how effectively Poles used the cut against the Turks. However, in light of the sources gathered, it is more probable that the cut was borrowed from Turkey and its origins can be traced back to at least the beginning of the sixteenth century.

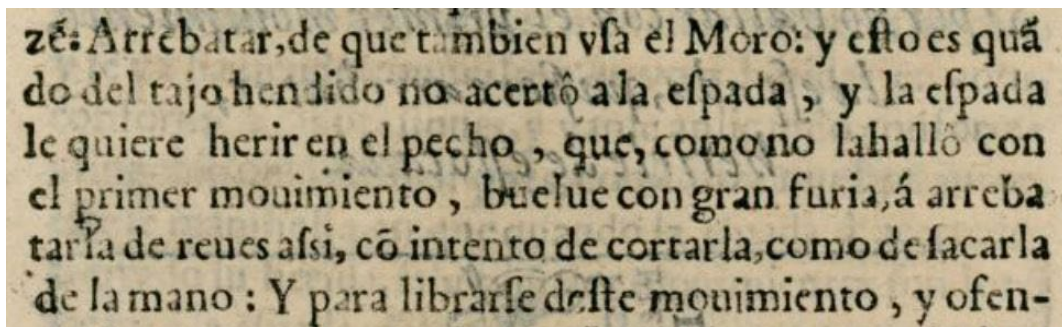
The first mention of the Turkish cut (*turkñ czug*) can be found in Andre Paurñfeyndt's treatise *Ergründung Ritterliher Kunst der Fecthery* ('Foundation of the Chivalric Art of Swordplay') from 1516.



TRANSLATION: If your opponent strikes to you from above, strike to him at the same time and step with the left foot well out to the right side, let him fall through emptily and draw the Turkish pull across his right arms' hand.

Though the descriptions of the Turkish cut and the Polish Fourth are separated by almost three hundred years, it is hard not to be struck by the visible similarities in the fencing technique as described by both Paurñfeyndt and Starzewski.

A similar cut – though this time directed at the opponent's weapon instead – can be found in a treatise by Luis Pacheco de Narváez, titled *Libro de las Grandeza de la Espada* (*A Book on the Greatness of the Sword*), from 1600. In the section that discusses how to use a rapier against Turks and Moors armed with sabres, Pacheco writes: Similar observations on the Turkish way of fighting can also be found in the works of Giuseppe D'Alessandro from Italy. In his 1723 treatise *Opera di d. Giuseppe D'Alessandro duca di Peschiolanciano divisa in cinque libri...*, Alessandro describes the Turkish elements of fencing, and similarly to Luis Pacheco de Narváez, he notes the powerful cut that is intended to deflect or destroy the opponent's weapon and then reaches him with a follow-up cut.¹⁶



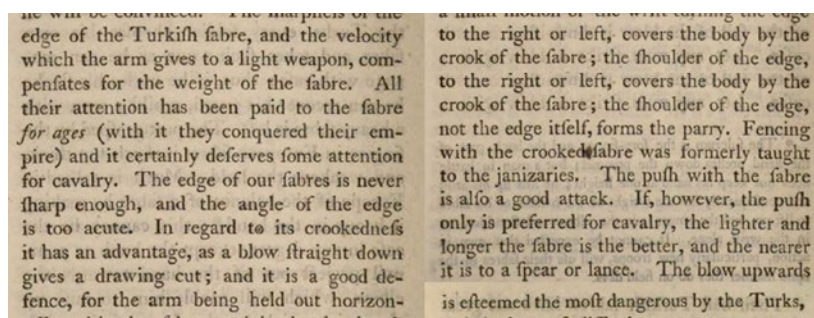
TRANSLATION: This happens when [the Turk], failing to meet the rapier with his *tajo hendido* [a vertical cut from above] is now threatened by a thrust, so he returns the same way, with great fury, to thus deflect [the rapier] with the cut from the left, from below, breaking it in half or disarming it from the hand.

¹⁶ Source: "Opera di d. Giuseppe D'Alessandro duca di Peschiolanciano divisa in cinque libri..." 1723 by Giuseppe d'Alessandro, Luca Basile (Translator)



TRANSLATION: The Turks are used, and the same for similar people who trust in the strenght of their arms and in the cut of their sabres, to fight with no rules, or measure, only careful to hit the enemy's weapons, considering them weaker, or the same enemy, not caring about their weapons, either because they think that he is discouraged, or they do not consider, that light weapons in the hands of ruled and brave men, usually are victorious. Now with people from this nation be careful to keep moving your rapier, but ready to wound, so that the sabre will not cut it off, or transport it with its weight.

An English officer, William Eton, in his *A Survey of the Turkish Empire* from 1798, also remarked that the cut from below ('the blow upwards'), characteristic of the Turks, is particularly effective.



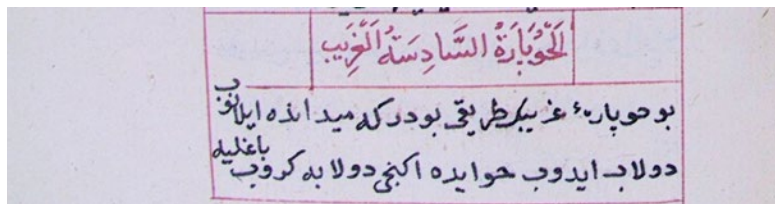
TRANSCRIPTION: "The sharpness of the edge of the Turkish sabre, and the velocity which the arm gives to a light weapon, compensates for the weight of the sabre. All their attention has been paid to the sabre for ages (with it they conquered their empire) and it certainly deserves some attention for cavalry. The edge of our sabres is never sharp enough, and the angle of the edge is too acute. In regard to its crookedness it has an advantage, as a blow straight down gives a drawing cut; and it is a good defence, for the arm being held out horizontally with the sabre upright in the hand, a small motion of the wrist turning the edge to the right or left, covers the body by the crook of the sabre; the shoulder of the edge, not the edge itself, forms the parry. Fencing with the crooked sabre was formerly taught to the janizaries. The push with the sabre is also a good attack. If, however, the push only is preferred for cavalry, the lighter and longer sabre is better, and the nearer it is to a spear or lance. The blow upwards is esteemed the most dangerous by the Turks, as it is most difficult to parry."

We can identify the origin of the popularity of these upwards or rising cuts among the Turks by looking at elements of cavalry training. It is highly probable that the techniques of using the sabre on foot were influenced in large part by how it was used on horseback. Munyatu'l Ghuzat, a Mamluk-Kipchak manuscript from the fourteenth century, devoted to furusiyya (*knightly exercises*) practiced in the Middle East, contains an interesting passage on how Kipchak warriors trained such cuts from below.

TRANSLATION: Also, know that the possessor of the sword needs to hit the ball with the polo stick on horseback. Because that practice makes him skillful in that and relaxes his muscles. I have seen many people who would strike with their swords in the hippodromes and (other) safe places, and they were able to use the sword, (but) in time of combat they would strike to the knees of their horses, or their ears and feet or they would strike and cut their own feet. There is no weapon from which its possessor must protect himself more than the sword (...)

When you wish to learn to strike with the sword on horseback, obtain a freshly picked reed or a thin fresh branch whose length should be about the height of the horseman. Then stick it (the reed in the ground) somewhere, so that it will never move. After that, ride away (from it in such a way that when you return), it is on your right, then ride your horse in the same way that you ride when you shoot an arrow. When you approach it and reach its side, draw your sword from its sheath with a beautiful movement, raise it (the sword) to the level of your right shoulder, strike that reed or branch and cut it off.¹⁷

In an Ottoman manuscript on the art of swordsmanship, *Tuḥfat al-ghuzāt* from 1533, written by Matrakçı Nasuh, we find a term *Dūlāb* ('the Mill'). It refers to a rising cut from the shoulder, from the right, or a combination of two rising cuts, the first of which (*the one beginning the circle*) is executed with the hand turned maximally to the left, and the second cut (*the one closing the circle*) is done with the hand turned maximally to the right.



TRANSLATION: The Sixth Form: The Oblique

This Form is that of the Oblique (gharīb). The ghāzī passes to enter into distance. He strikes a half cut (hū) at the opponent [a descending cut], then quickly shifts to perform a Waterwheel Cut (*Dūlāb eydüb*). The ghāzī binds the opponent (bāghlaya) by entering in with a second Waterwheel Cut (*Dūlāb eydüb*).¹⁸

What is interesting both the name and the execution of the Turkish 'Mill' are very similar to the nineteenth-century descriptions of a combination of cuts known in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as *Młyniec* or the 'Mill'.

¹⁷ Source: „A 14th Century Mamluk - Kipchak Military Treatise: Munyatu'l Ghuzat” Translation and interpretation by Kurtulus Oztocpu;

¹⁸ Source: „Treatise Dedicated to the Holy Warriors (*Tuḥfat al-ghuzāt*) 939AH / 1533 CE” by Matrakçı Nesūhi Transcribed, translated, and interpreted by: Hamilton Parker Cook

This is how different authors describe the ‘Polish Mill’.

których dziś uważa w konnicy austriackiej. Znano także młynca, robiono go — o ile doszła mi jeszcze tradycja w tej mierze — od dołu ku górze, znano jednak także młyniec od góry ku dołowi, pierwszy zwano polskim, drugi francuskim. Używano go więcej jako ćwiczenia

Historia i psychologia szermierki - (*History and Psychology of Fencing*),
Aleksander Raciborski, 1894.

Transcription: Znano także młynca, robiono go — o ile doszła mi jeszcze tradycja w tej mierze — od dołu ku górze, znano także młyniec od góry ku dołowi, pierwszy zwano polskim, drugi francuskim.

Translation: There was a młyniec [little mill] and — if the traditions passed to me can be correct — it was performed in a rising fashion, by moving up from below. There was also a descending młyniec, which moved down from above. The former was called Polish, the latter French.

Summing up the above, it is quite probable that the Turkish Cut and the Mill could have been borrowed from the Ottoman Empire during the sixteenth century when king Sigismund Augustus expanded trade and diplomatic relations with the Ottomans, or, it could have been borrowed during the wars with Turkey in the seventeenth century.

Spotykany w literaturze naszej młyniec polski, nawiasem powiedziawszy cięcie historyczne a nie wymysł powieściopisarzy, był połączeniem młynca w kierunku cięcia w bok (cios na podlew), z młyncem w kierunku cięcia w brzuch, wykonywanem jednak tylcem szabli (cios nyżkiem czyli polska kwarta). Technika wykonania była inna, gdyż skutkiem małej długości rękojeści uchwyt szabli był inny, inną też jej waga i środek ruchów leżał w przegubie ręcznym, sama kombinacja jednak dwu cięć od dołu ku górze była dobrą. Współ-

Włodzimierz Mańkowski - *Szermierka na szable*. 1929

Transcription: Spotykany w literaturze naszej młyniec polski, nawiasem powiedziawszy cięcie historyczne a nie wymysł powieściopisarzy, był połączeniem młynca w kierunku cięcia w bok (cios na podlew) [dolne diagonalne cięcie od lewej], z młyncem w kierunku cięcia w brzuch, wykonywanem jednak tylcem szabli (cios nyżkiem czyli polska kwarta) [dolne diagonalne cięcie od prawej]. Technika wykonania była inna, gdyż skutkiem małej długości rękojeści uchwyt szabli był inny, inną też jej waga i środek ruchów leżał w przegubie ręcznym, sama kombinacja jednak dwu cięć od dołu ku górze była dobrą.

Translation: The Polish Mill, which we encounter in our literature — by the way, a truly historical cut, not just a fantastical invention of novelists — was a combination of a moulinet in the direction of the cut into the side (na podlew) [a low diagonal cut from the left], with a moulinet in the direction of the cut into the stomach, though performed with the back edge of the sabres (nyżek or Polish fourth) [a low diagonal cut from the right]. The technique of how to perform this cut was different, since because of the short hilt, the grip of the sabre was different, as was its weight, and the centre of the motion was in the wrist. The combination of two rising cut, though was a good one.

CONCLUSIONS

My aim in creating this study was to illustrate that reconstructing the Old Polish art of fencing is an extremely complex matter. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was a state that arose where two different cultures met – the world of the East and the world of the West. Due to this particular geographic location, Poles had to fight wars and battles with enemies of a diverse range of technological and cultural characteristics. To oppose such adversaries effectively, it was necessary to combine the eastern and western methods of fighting. This joining of two different paradigms can be found in military tactics, in the weapons and armour, and in the pedagogical methods used to train soldiers. It is not surprising, then, that these trends would also be reflected in the art of fencing. The development of fencing techniques is a process that is governed by the historical context. The method by which a weapon is used cannot be divorced from the main trends and concepts that were present in a particular time period. If the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw a dominance of the Italian and German schools of fencing, then it was a result of a long and complex set of processes. If, according to contemporary authors, Polish fencing was more cut- than thrust-based, then we would have been much closer to the German style (which preferred cuts) than the Italian (where thrusts were more important). A linguistic analysis of *The Hetman Books* seems to corroborate this observation and the frequent allusions to the German traditions only make this conclusion stronger, as do the illustrations of Polish and Hungarian fencers in German treatises that focus on dussack/sabre. Considering the source materials that have been presented here, dussack could have been a training tool to learn how to fence with a sabre (of the eastern or western type). This could mean that the Germans also borrowed eastern blades – via Hungary – just as Poland did. As I have mentioned earlier, fencing is a science that rests on universal principles, and the differences we see arise from the choices that fencers make when selecting available techniques. It is equally applicable to the sabre. Because the physical construction of a curved blade determines to a large extent the way in which it can be used, it was primarily the choices and a selection of a repertoire of techniques that characterised particular national styles. In the case of Poles, this style was dominated by cross-cuts, whose broad application became a defining characteristic of the Old Polish fencers.

***A SELECTION OF SOURCE MATERIALS FROM 16TH, 17TH AND 18TH CENTURIES
NOT INCLUDED, OR MUCH ABRIDGED, IN THE STUDY ABOVE.***

FRANCESCO ANTONIO MARCELLI

*„Regole dela scherma” 1686
About the Rules of Fencing - 4th Book¹⁹*

**HOW TO USE THE SABRE AGAINST THE SWORD AND HOW TO DEFEND YOURSELF
WITH THE SWORD AGAINST THE SABRE**

I don't know why I've never found anything about sabre play, in either modern or ancient texts; but I know for sure that this is an ancient weapon, which is used in many nations, especially the eastern ones, such as Sweden, Poland, Hungary and Turkey, and many other places different from our for climate, religion and rituals. I suppose that, since all books about fencing have been written by Italian authors, they (the authors) just wrote about what you can purchase and use in Italy. So they just wrote about the sword (rapier), because it is the only one we have in our tradition and the only one allowed by the princes. Today, I see that the habit of wearing the sabre has been brought to us, not a few people trust to use it in various occasions, so I opted not to ignore the matter. So here you get a few instructions about the sabre.

THE WAY TO GRIP THE SABRE AND HOW MANY PARTS IT IS DIVIDED IN

The sabre is a single edged weapon, long three palms, a bit more or a bit less. It is not straight as the sword is, but it is somewhat curved at the point, where, in a tongue like shape, it ends with two edges.

The blade is four times, or more, broader than the sword's one, because of this, and of the weight, which is a lot, and the edge, which is acute, the sabre hurts with vigour and falls with strength. This weapon is very dangerous because of its cuts, which are far more lethal than the sword's and, at times, they remove limbs cleanly.

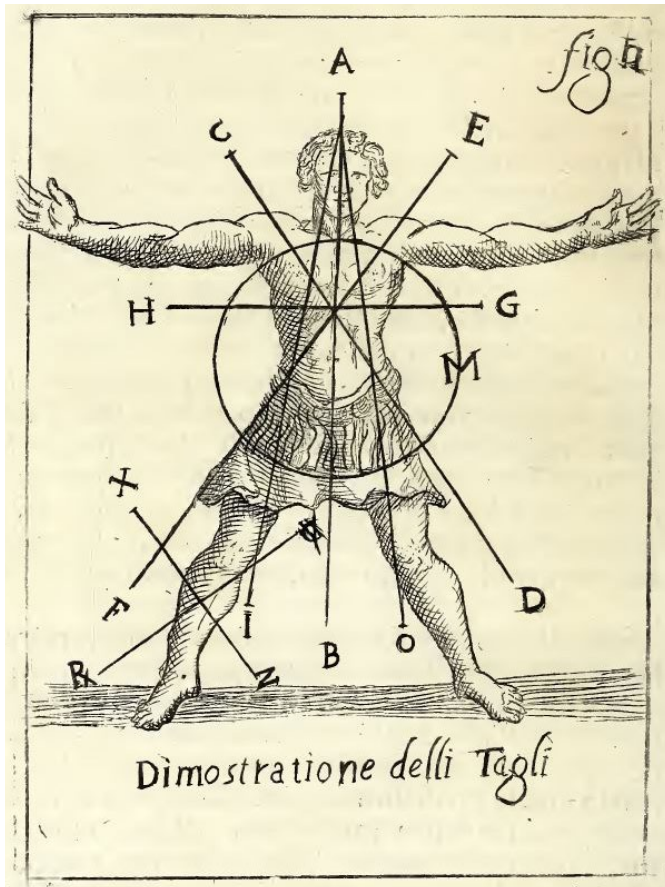
The sabre is not made of three parts like the sword: forte, terzo and debole, it is considered to be made of just one part, which includes the whole blade, because it has all the same strength and quality. So, the sabre is considered to be all forte, because you can hurt and defend with any part of it, be it the point, the middle or the one close to the hilt. You can sever the enemy with any part of a sabre's edge (I say edge, because the sabre doesn't hurt with the point), all parts have equal strength, with no quantity variation, because the blade doesn't vary in quality. The sabre is to be gripped in a locked key fashion, putting the index in that hollow which is found in its cross⁵, so that, being held fast in the hand, one has a secure grip, able to resist to the violence of the moves, and doesn't lose the hold on it, which could easily happen, if one held it in another way, or tried to play with it in the light fashion we suppose is appropriate to the sword. Here some arguments are not valid, those I stated about the sword don't hold, we're talking about a totally different weapon, in nature and play, it is, anyway, necessary to practice its play, despite different in rules, in order to find rules appropriate to the instrument (the sabre), with which they are supposed to be used.

GUARD AND PARRIES WITH THE SABRE

The guard of the sabre doesn't require that body and belly positioning I taught, when I dealt with the sword's guard. This guard is assumed with the body straight, upright, remaining in a standing position; when you play with the sabre you have to keep a stiff body (not bend over) and the feet well planted on the ground; so that you don't risk to bend over with the cuts, which most of the time miss and could unbalance you in the recovery phase, when they meet no resistance. The way to defend from the sword's thrusts is obtained by the standard sabre operations and by the way its cuts move, such cuts, delivered quickly, will perform both tasks (defending and offending). However, we must say that, in order to obtain such effects, you must operate the sabre swiftly, so that the cuts are many, quick and close together, the path of the cut should be almost impossible to see. If you play slowly with the sabre, your opponent's thrusts will find the time and place to hit. It happens also in the sabre case that you have to adapt your actions to the chances that your opponent's actions give, and to the measure he sets. You can, no doubt, step forward and retreat backward with ease, moving the feet with solidness (stability), using

¹⁹Source: „The Sabre of Francesco Antonio Marcelli” by Francesco Antonio Marcelli, Carlo Parisi (Translator)

natural and short steps, instead of long and furious ones. It happens that the opponent, being afraid of coming in distance, doesn't risk to give his strikes at the appropriate measure, but he throws some strikes from far away, to keep his opponent at distance. In this case, it is necessary to parry, stepping in the same time, in order to get closer to the enemy and hit him with the cutting riposte.



Cutting diagram - Francesco Antonio Marcelli „Regole della scherma” 1686

All the cuts explained in the first part of the book can be used with the sabre, the main ones being the mandritto and the reverso (inside, outside), either fendenti (coming down vertical) or oblique (angled), because they are the most dangerous, since they hit high, in the head area. Although all sabre cuts are good, with these you have the chance to quickly overcome the opponent.

ONE MUST NOT USE THE PASSATE, WITH THE SWORD AGAINST THE SABRE

The foolishness of the one who thought he could escape to that blade, which cannot be stopped and prevented to hurt in such occasions, would be very well punished. Fate wouldn't spare him, because what happened would have happened for a reason. One would be very silly if he did not see, by himself, the unavoidable danger of doing the passata, against the sabre armed enemy, and he'd have little judgment in not seeing its effect beforehand, since it gives the target, instead of taking it away, to the opponent's cut. I can concede that, when the passata is done at the appropriate speed, one can hit the opponent with his thrust, however, it cannot be that your speed is such that you cannot be hit by the opponent's cut, which is operated with the sabre, that can hurt at such a close range. In this case, the usual argument regarding swords: that thrusts are more dangerous than cuts, so it is no big trouble to get at close range to give a thrust and receive a cut, doesn't apply. This argument is based on the fact that the sword's cut is weak at close range and it cannot be as dangerous as the thrust, however, a sabre's cut is different from a sword's thrust: it can sever the head and take the life in one blow, it is also a fact that, if the cut falls perpendicular, it can sever a limb cleanly.

HOW TO USE FEINTS WITH THE SABRE

You can feint cuts, with a sabre, although not easily, pretending to hit in a place and hitting in another instead. One way to feint, from which the others can be deduced, can be seen in the following picture.

Having the attacker thrown a mandritto tondo to the hip, the defender attempted to parry it, because he couldn't slip it, opposing the forte of the sword, however, since the attacker did not finish that cut, the defender got hit, in the same time, in the head by a reverso. In order to have the necessary speed, for such feints, one must remember the universal rule regarding cuts: they are to be delivered with the wrist only, without moving the whole arm, or they become wide and slow movements.



So, you feint with the mandritto tondo and you hit with the reverso or you can feint with the reverso and hit with the mandritto, which would be the case in the picture if the attacking knight, feinting on the line A, compelling the defender to parry, in the same time recovered the sword along the line C and hit in B. One can deduce the other ways to feint from this one, by way of a long practice, understanding which occasions are more advantageous for him.

HOW TO GET TO WRESTLING WITH THE SABRE

One of the advantages to consider, in possession of the one who uses the sabre against the one who uses the sword, is that he can get to the grips, but the other can't. Here I confirm what I said previously: the grips can be taken with many actions. In the previous picture, the knight 38 has performed an inside parry, then, lunging in, and using his opponent's effort to deliver his strike, he took the grip in the way shown. The knight who got hit could not escape this quick action because, being in such a position of great effort for the body, he needed far longer a time, in order to get away than the assailant needed to hit him.



WHICH ACTIONS AREN'T TO BE PERFORMED WITH THE SABRE AGAINST THE SWORD

The actions to be performed with the sabre are the ones I previously explained, one has to avoid the infinite set of actions that belong to sword fencing, because they are good with the sword, but dangerous with the sabre.

Single time actions, which are so important with the sword, are very dangerous with the sabre, because, being this a weapon that hurts with the edge only, it is not the case that it can hit the opponent with the edge and set aside his point, in a single time: the first action doesn't have in itself the second, the defence, so you cannot offend in single time. With the sabre, you don't do the quarte (inquarete), the sottobotte (single time counter involving crouching), the passate and the fianconate, or the others I taught for the sword. We are in a totally different context and we have to perform those actions that cope with the instrument we're using. Perfection in sabre play comes from a long and conscious practice, with which the arm is made stronger and more agile, developing the speed and readiness that are necessary. Such virtues have to be developed to the point that you can close any possible way to the enemy's thrusts, by way of cutting often and quickly.

One also has to pay a lot of attention to measure, so that he doesn't get so close he offers the body to the opponent's point, which have a reach twice that of cuts: not just because of the nature of the cut, which is always shorter than the thrust, not being delivered with the body forward and the arm stretched, but also for the short reach of the sabre, which is shorter than the sword. So I say one has to be very cautious in hurting in single time, with the sabre, and that it is more advisable to do so in double time, especially appropriate is doing so, when you see that you've set aside the opponent's point, and you can go in measure and hit with a cut, without having to fear to be hit by his point.

From the preceding reflection it follows that, if one acts along the appropriate rules, he acts safely. Footwork must support the cut, giving it more power and strength, but it must always be fit to the natural movement of the strike. You can step forward and backward, to the left or to the right, but always making short steps, with body upright and well centred (between the feet). One has to walk remaining stable, without haste. It is necessary to consider what action is to be taken, in order to match it with appropriate footwork. One has to be strong and stable on the ground, with the body on a line and well gathered, so that he doesn't become unstable and fall, for the fury of the cuts.

It often happens that the arm gets tired and weak, because of the weight of the sabre, the strength of the cuts and the length of the fight. In this case, being astute, you can catch breath and rest, without letting the opponent notice it because, if the opponent noticed that you're tired, he could press upon you with his thrusts, while your cuts are slow. You can go to a longer measure, and get more distant from the enemy, by being smart and pretending to assume a better position or to be planning something, so that your enemy doesn't pursue you with his thrusts, this will permit you to rest and come back stronger to the fight. It is necessary, though, to pretend that your slower moves and retreat depend upon your intention to cheat the opponent and not upon necessity.

HOW TO FIGHT WITH THE SWORD AGAINST THE SABRE

The only one rule that the sword armed fighter has to follow, when he deals with a sabre armed opponent, is to slip his point in any way from the opponent's cuts. For this reason, in this case, *toccate* and *attacchi* (actions involving blade contact) or any similar actions, are of no use, because the sabre doesn't stay forward in line, has no weak part, which you can engage with the sword and, most important: its point is never static, because of continuous cutting. The only one action I hold as valuable, with the sword against the sabre, is the straight thrust in time, delivered in the point in which the opponent's cut begins, not when you see the blade falling, but when you see the point dropping to begin the cut. With this action one defends himself, offends the opponent and keeps him far away, so that he cannot come close and hit with those so dangerous and deadly cuts. I leave to the common sense of prudent the form of his retreat, which has to be fast, he doesn't need my advice about this. The speed must be such that you have to have given the thrust already and come back to guard, before your opponent can find your sword with his cut, knowing the unavoidable danger of doing otherwise: either your arm will not withstand the impact and you will be disarmed, or the sabre armed guy, hitting the sword, will be able to use the time of the *riposte*.

The one who has the sword must not come to the grips or go in a strength confrontation against the one with the sabre; he must not feint, use *sottobotte* or *passate*. So, in the end, to say it all by saying little: only the straight thrust allows you to have the upper hand in this confrontation, permitting to hurt very quickly and save yourself.

NICOLETTO GIGANTI

“Libro secondo di Niccolotto Giganti Venetiano” 1608.

Second book of Nicoletto Gigantiego from Venice²⁰

I would like to teach you how to defend yourself with cuts, in cases of necessity, against two or three people. If you are attacked by two people as often occurs, if you cut a mandritto at one, in that tempo the other will strike at you. While if you thrust at one, in the tempo you will take a thrusts from the other. Therefore you will quickly find yourself dead, as happened to many.

In order to both attack and defend, I want you to keep your sword high as if to deliver a mandritto. If both thrust at you simultaneously, you should cut a mandritto into their swords, followed by a roverscio.

The mandritto should be delivered so it almost wounds your enemy's neck, and finishes ready to attack again from the left. In this manner the mandritto has two effects, it offends and protects at the same time. Having delivered the mandritto you should bring your body and foot back, put the sword under your left arm ready for the roverscio, then quickly execute this roverscio as follows. It should begin by attacking your opponent's neck, and end once more on your right side.

The mandritto and roverscio therefore attack in the form of a cross. With this method you both attack and defend, since your sword must inevitably find your enemies weapons. Note that the mandritti and roversci should be delivered long, hard, quickly and without ever stopping. As soon as you perform the mandritto the roverscio should follow. Likewise having delivered the roverscio, you should execute the mandritto without any delay. In other words they should continue like a wheel.

To perform these sorts of cuts, you must exercise by delivering mandritti and roversci to condition your arm and quicken your legs, training by executing two or three hundred cuts, and just as many roversci, without stopping. In this manner anyone can parry thrusts, even from three or four opponents, while wounding and keeping the enemy at bay to the full length of their sword, by delivering long, quick, strong and wide cuts.

These sorts of cuts are such, that if an unarmored gentleman with the sword alone is attacked by fully armored enemy with sword and dagger, who sets upon him with a thrusts and imbroccate, he can defend his life as follows.

He should hold his sword as described above, high as if to cut, and as his enemy thrusts he should send mandritto into his sword, followed by a swift roverscio to his head, or else to his leg, before quickly returning out of measure.

This is because by delivering a mandritto into the enemy's sword as he thrusts, he will cast his enemy's sword to the ground, and by returning his own sword forward he is able to perform not just one roverscio, but two or three, before quickly retreating back.

If the enemy delivered a hundred consecutive thrusts, he could parry all of them safely, and wound his enemy with roverscio to the face or legs.

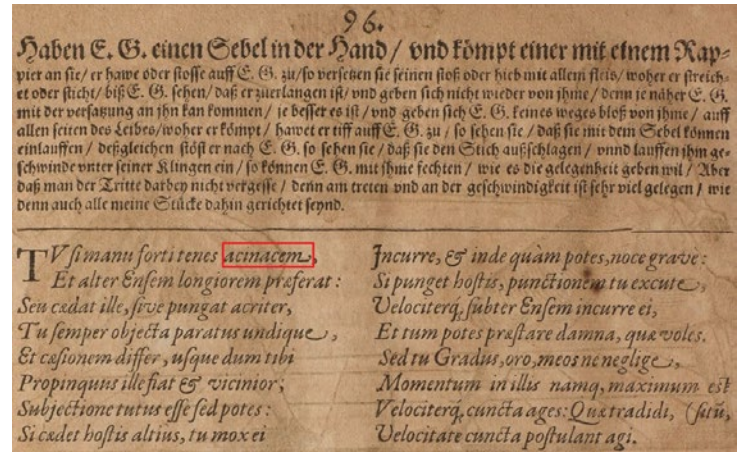
Furthermore cuts delivered in this manner are such that, if your opponent delivered an imbroccata or thrust, by parrying it with mandritto, you might easily cause his sword to fall from his hand, finding his arm weak after having thrust. I therefore urge anyone who desires to practice, to deliver cuts in this manner. So they defend and attack, unlike cuts which only offend but do not protect if enemy strikes in the same tempo.

²⁰ Source: *The 'Lost' Second Book of Nicoletto Giganti(1608): A Rapier Fencing Treatise by Nicoletto Giganti, Piermarco Terminiello (Translator), Joshua Pendragon (Translator)*

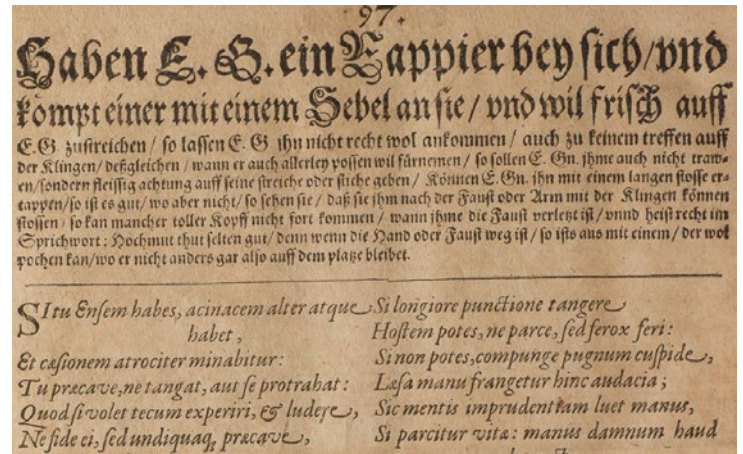
MICHAEL HUNDT

“Ein new Künstliches Fechtbuch im Rappier” 1611.

A New Illustrated Fencing Manual on Rapier



Translation: 96. If Your Grace has a Sabre in the hand, and one comes at you with a Rappier, and he cuts or thrusts at your grace, then set off his thrusts or cuts with all diligence, wherever he has struck or thrust. If your grace sees, that he is reachable () and that you are not too far back from him, because the closer to the displacing of him, the better it is, that you provide no means of an opening to him on all sides of the body, where he comes from, and then he cuts deep at your grace, then you must see, that you may run in with the Sabre, likewise, if he thrusts at your grace, then see that you cut away the thrust, and run in quickly under his blade, thus can Your Grace fence with him, as it will give you the opportunity. But that you must not forget the steps, because the stepping and the speed is very much located, as well as all my stücken that are targeted there.



Translation: 97. If Your Grace has a Rappier with you, and one comes at you with a Sabre and will briskly strike at you, then Your Grace must not allow him to properly approach, nor to hit your blade, likewise, when he also will undertake all forms of antics (tricks), thus should Your Grace not trust him, but rather pay diligent attention to his strikes or thrusts, and Your Grace can catch him with a long thrust, thus it is good that you see when you can thrust him to the fist or arm, so that he cannot get away with many great thoughts when his fist is injured, and is said rightly by the saying: „Arrogance rarely does well, because if the hand or fist is gone, so it is with one who can knock well, where he otherwise remains at the court.

SEBASTIAN HEUSSLER
 “*Neu Kunstlich Fechtbuch*” 1616.”

New Artful Fencing Book



Translation: In another manner

46. If he cuts in at your head from outside of your blade, then pay careful attention to when he cuts, that you step well back with your left foot and cut likewise with him from outside to his right arm, how you are shown in this following image.



Translation: FROM THE BALGER CUTS

Now follow how you can cut him to his right arm.

52. If he cuts in at you from inside, and will cut inside at your head, than pay careful attention to when his cut comes, that you step back with your left foot, and lower your body well behind and thereby take him in the Measure, and cut at the same time with him inside at his right arm, how you see in this following Figure

²¹ Source: „Sebastian Heussler’s New Artful Fencing Book: A Translation and Biographical Account” by Kevin Maurer

GIOVANNI ALBERTO CASSANI
“ *Essercitio Militare...* ” 1603
Military Exercises²²

ON FENCING

In fencing there are two arcs, or rather circles, the dritto and the roverscio.

These are divided into four simple blows:

SOTTO (*right diagonal from the bottom*)
RISOTTO (*left diagonal from the bottom*)
SOPRA (*right diagonal from the top*)
RISOPRA (*left diagonal from the top*)

Whereas there are twelve composite blows:

SOTTO & RISOPRA	SOPRA & RISOPRA	SOTTO & SOPRA
RISOPRA & SOTTO	RISOPRA & SOPRA	SOPRA & SOTTO
RISOTTO & SOPRA	SOTTO & RISOTTO	RISOTTO & RISOPRA
SOPRA & RISOTTO	RISOTTO & SOTTO	RISOPRA & RISOTTO

ATTACKING WITH TWO STEPS

To employ these said blows, both simple and composite, you should (in my view) perform them with two steps, starting with your left, before quickly returning back with the same two steps you attacked with. You should employ neither more nor fewer steps in defence, never turning your back on your enemy.

With the simple blows, they should accompany your steps in twos: two forward and two back, as I described above. This is because on your first step, which is always performed with your left foot, you should beat your enemy's sword. With your second step, passing your right foot forward, you should attack your enemy.

You should then quickly return back, with the same sequence of two steps you attacked with. During this retreat you should take care only to defend, and not attack. Again be advised never to turn your back on your enemy while withdrawing.

ATTACKING WITH THREE STEPS

To attack with three forward steps, again you should defend on retreating, in the same sequence of three steps, not withdraw with fewer or more steps than you used in attack, never turn your back on your enemy, and as before parrying while you take the three steps back.

The three steps you perform forward in attack should start with your right foot, not with your left as described during the attack with two steps.

The blows you should deliver during attacks with three steps are the following:

SOPRA, RISOPRA & SOPRA	SOTTO, RISOTTO & SOTTO
RISOPRA, SOPRA & RISOPRA	RISOTTO, SOTTO & RISOTTO

Otherwise with the four simple blows described above, one at a time.

²²Source: „Brief notes on fencing, from the military treatise of giovanni alberto cassani (1603)” by Piermarco Terminiello

ATTACKING WITH ONE STEP

You can also attack your enemy with one step at a time, employing the two arcs, or rather circles I mentioned at the beginning: the dritto and the roverscio. You can advance and withdraw as you please, as the opportunity presents itself.

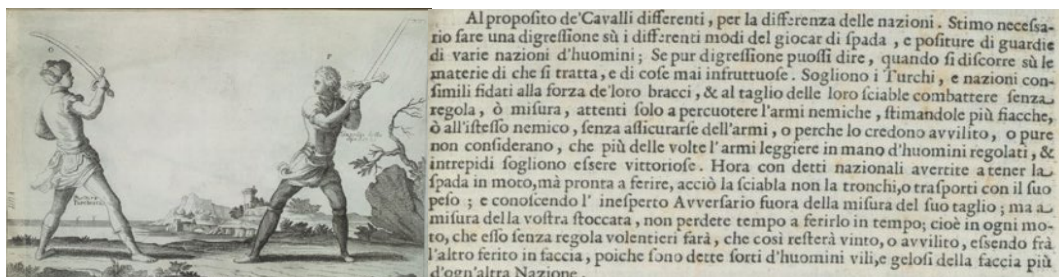
In this manner all the blows, whether simple, that is one at a time, or composite with two or three in a row, should finish with the right foot forward and not the left. Then you should retreat with the same sequence of steps you used to attack the enemy, not taking more or fewer.

Always study the enemy in order to oppose him with the said attacks, or alternatively with the same blows he uses, but in the right tempo, so that as one finishes the other begins.

For declaration and better understanding of the over described fencing (Scrima) we would need demonstrations here following, or painted pictures, to see and note the site, place, times, or blows, so as the acts and gestures, which similar are used to and can be done, but also because any curious person, and dedicated to the military art, only in exercising himself with swords or training swords, without any other demonstrations, or pictures, at his home, or with others in public schools in this exercise (in my opinion), will better learn and put in execution and practice, than sometimes me drawing and demonstrating them in this place.

GIUSEPPE D'ALESSANDRO,

*“Opera di d. Giuseppe D’Alessandro duca di Peschiolanciano divisa in cinque libri...” 1723*²³



Translation: Apropos different horses, for the differences among nations. I deem necessary take a digression about the different ways of playing with swords, and guards of different nations of men; if we could talk about a digression, when we talk about the subjects we're dealing with. The Turks are used, and the same for similar people who trust in the strength of their arms and in the cut of their sabres, to fight with no rules, or measure, only careful to hit the enemy's weapons, considering them weaker, or the same enemy, not caring about their weapons, either because they think that he is discouraged, or they do not consider, that light weapons in the hands of ruled and brave men, usually are victorious. Now with people from this nation be careful to keep moving your rapier, but ready to wound, so that the sabre will not cut it off, or transport it with its weight; and knowing the inexperienced adversary out from the measure of his cut, but in the measure of your stoccata, do not lose time to wound him in time; that is to say in every move, that he will do willingly with no rule, so that he will stay won, or discouraged, being even more wounded in face, because these sorts of men vile, and jealous of the face more than any other nation.

²³ Source: *“Opera di d. Giuseppe D’Alessandro duca di Peschiolanciano divisa in cinque libri...” 1723* by Giuseppe d’Alessandro, Luca Basile (Translator)

FREDRICH MEYER

„Büchsenmeister- und Feuerwerksbuch“ 1594²⁴



Translation: To make a Flaming Saber

Take the previously heard reports of an obscene Hungarian Saber made with a curved blade, that should have a hollow fluting, pushed in, from one and quarter inches to the edges, and not more than a half an inch, however the back edge should still be sharp enough to cut, then it is ready, thus take these Raumstein Rockets as set forth here filled in and glued to all measurements, how you are taught of these wide Swords, then let it flutter, and thus it is ready.

Also you make a Dussack with the outside dressed in fire, the same way as the Saber, except that on the back edge, you should bore small circular holes into it, not all the way through, but rather its better that they should remain a half quarter and half way between the fluting and the back edge. Within these, you can disguise the small Rockets, these same circular holes should be as small as the Rockets that go in them, thus of the edges glued out, allow no rolls in this, rather it should only be added like the double Rockets in the Busiean.

The better to understand, you have an image of each one here.

- A. Depiction of the teaching Saber
- C. The teaching Dussack

- B. The finished arrangement
- D. How the fire is inlayed and arranged

²⁴ Source: „Büchsenmeister- und Feuerwerksbuch“ 1594 by Fredrich Meyer, Kevin Maurer (Translator)

