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## Polish Martial Art – Signum Polonicum: Historical background, profile and the main plots of the system

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### 1. Historical background

Poland, lying on the borderland of East and West, from the very dawn of its existence found itself in the region where intersected many “communication routes”, hence Eastern and Western influences. Those were related to not only economic and cultural fields, but also military ones, which had an unquestionable impact on military training, and following, martial art. Such a location of our country allowed populations living at these terrains to use civilisation and cultural trophies of different nations. This was very profitable for arising armed force and its battle training. We from little nations could acquaint ourselves with fighting techniques of the nations from West, East, North and South, and even from Far East through Mongolians.

Already in the period of the first ruler of Poland – Mieszko – we were presented with the foreigners’ reports coming from people who wrote about military strength of a contemporary Polish warrior. The chronicler, Thietmar bishop of Merseburg wrote so about his warriors: “*exercitus quantitate parvus, qualitate sua optimus et omnis est ferreus*” (“*the (Polish) army, being in great quantity, is equally great considering the quality, as well as manliness, and each and every is as strong as iron*”).

Staying in Czech land an Arabian traveller, Ibrahim ibn Jacob, who learned about our country from the reports of al Bekri, describing Poland admitted that Mieszko “... *possesses 3000 of heavy armoured man divided in squads counting 100 people, and every hundred means as much as ten such squads of different warriors*”. This meant one Polish warrior counted for 10 other warriors. Simplifying that thought, one can say that one Polish warrior could defeat ten different warriors. This acknowledgement of the first ruler’s of Poland battle team value testifies distinctly that training of the contemporary Polish

warrior was on the perfect level. That truth was confirmed to us by the victorious battle fought by Mieszko and his brother Czcibor under Cedynia on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June, 972, where the Polish army defeated the German army led by margrave Hodon. This fact was noted down by Thietmar of Merseburg, and supplied with information from Brunon of Quefurt that Mieszko had won margrave Hodon by “art” .

Poles preferred horse combat from the beginning; it was demonstrated in particular during the Middle Ages period when cavalry became the basis of the Polish army. Formed in that time on the West knight’s culture and connected with it knights’ joust tournaments came to Poland, where they promptly gained many followers and were fixed as a part of knight’s efficiency shows, enriching existing in that time “knight’s martial art”.

In spite of the fact that Poles took over knights’ examples from the West, their training and martial art in that time went in a somewhat different direction. That was, above all, influenced by numerous wars Polish knighthood had to lead with the formed Order of the Teutonic Knights of St. Mary’s Hospital in Jerusalem, Mongolian invasion, or threat from Rus’, Vlachs, Serbians, Hungarians and Turkey. As a result of those numerous wars and hereto formed alliances Poles were faced with a necessity to elaborate effective methods of the fighting both against heavy cavalry from the Teutonic Order and western knighthood and light armoured hordes of Tatars, Vlachs and Serbians. Alliances formed with the Czechs, Hungarians and Lithuanians favourably influenced enrichment of fighting methods, which effected in the victory over the Western knighthood in the battle of Grunwald in 1410, when Polish-Lithuanian armies broke entirely Teutonic Orders’ armies helped by selected mercenary knights from the West. First-class battle value of a Polish knight was confirmed

in the largest battle of late Middle Ages in Europe. Furthermore, this value was sealed in the individual duel performed by the Polish knight Zawisza Czarny, (Zawisza the Black), Sulima Coat of arms, of Garbów in 1415 during the council in Constance, where he entered the joust with the best knight from the West then, the duke John of Aragon, whom he defeated with one hit of the lance in the first clash, confirming this way his primacy in the knights' martial arts. No European knight entered into a tournament fight with him since, and he alone was considered never defeated in combat.

The victory of Grunwald confirmed finally the primacy of Polish cavalry as the basic battle strength of the Polish army, and simultaneously insistent works over riding art improvement and martial art with use of the horse begun.

At the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century Poland found itself in the strong threat coming from East and South, mainly because of Tatars and Turks, which resulted in creation of armed formations able to oppose those armies. It was the time, when the whole of Europe undergone changes in the military and progressive firearms development seriously influenced the weakness and in consequence elimination of the heavy armoured knighthood from the battlefield. The West was developing infantry arming it with pikes and muskets, and introduced a bilbo instead of the sword. The cavalry began to be moved to the further plan, and alongside with the infantry development grew up demand on its training. Fencing academies came into being, presenting various fighting methods with the use of many weapons; nevertheless, they focused on fighting with the bilbo. Numerous textbooks were also issued in this field.

The situation in Poland was different. The basis was a horse warrior who had to defeat great spaces and to fight with the enemy of various nationality representing various fighting methods. He had to be quick and effective in combat. Similarly now as in the West, the Polish knight threw aside sword and heavy armour, but he based his strength not on firearms but on the curved sabre and the copy, which became lighter than knight's, but considerably more effective and flexible in combat. Polish noblesmen who came into being in that time took over knights' traditions taking on weight of the defence of motherland, freedom and Christian belief. They chose the sabre in place of the sword, which in time became a beloved weapon of the Polish nation, and as the main breaking weapon – copy and horse.

This transformation took place in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which began birth and development of the old Polish art of combat, thereby the martial art. Political structure prevailing in our country

and especially weakening of monarchical power in favour of the lower house caused the resolution of taxes on the army had been an unusually difficult matter. Noblesmen did not want to tax themselves voluntarily hence weight of keeping the army fell onto the king. As a result the army was small, which paradoxically had impact on the martial art development. That small in numbers army had to make up for its lacks of quality and efficacy in combat; existing then cavalry had favoured fluency in the martial art. This led to creation of cavalry formations which reached the superb battle value: hussars, armoured companions, elcars, current defence soldiers. Notable changes in the military superseded in times of Stefan Batory, who in 1578 gave the “uniwersał” defining i.a. a hussar and an infantryman creating so-called chosen infantry. In that time come into being numerous works from the military scope, however not all get permission to be published. This happened with the work about military by Stanisław Sarnicki: *The hetmans' books of the knights' history from all the centuries gathered, and practices; or hetmans' experiences, His Majesty Polish king Sigismund the Old, and also Carl V the Emperor, and Turkish Suleiman, two lords brave, in our century; illustrated for the practice of young people of our Polish nation (Księgi hetmańskie z dziejów rycerskich wszystkich wieków zebrane, i praktika, albo experientia hetmanów, najiasniejszego Zygmunta Starego króla polskiego, a także cesarza Karla V., i Solimana tureckiego, dwu panów walecznych, za naszego wieku; objaśnione ku ćwiczeniu młodych ludzi nacyi naszej polskiej)*, which the Polish king forbade to be published, stating it contained too important data from the field of the military.

However, the main changes became in a practical range. First of all a Polish sabre fencing art called “the cross-shaped art” was created. In 1578 an anonymous fencing instruction appeared *Excercising and examples of taking thrusts and cuts as parades and blocks by the cross-shaped art*. There was developed a martial art using the hussar lance, combat with the ice-axe, bow shooting and also training of the battle horse which became the fight companion – fighting equally with his master. This produced in the Polish nation relation to the horse and bond with it absent elsewhere, as a companion of the soldier's lot and misery. Transformations followed in the construction of the weapon itself. Poles took over the sabre from Turks through Hungary, yet not its construction. The sabre, which came to us through Hungary, so-called “batorówka sabre”, seemed to be constructively insufficient to Polish requirements. It was improved creating a completely new kind of the battle sabre called “hussar” with so-called “finger ring”, which became

the best side-arm of the contemporary battlefield in Europe. Weapon specialists compare effectiveness and battle functionality of this weapon only with the Japanese sabre.

However in spite of the cavalry development, it was not forgotten about the infantry, which was created after Hungarian fashion but consisted of Polish citizens as well, for the training of whose the first Polish infantry regulations were given by Błażej Lipowski in Cracow, 1660: *Infantry practice or military for foot soldiers*.

Direct examples of the old Polish fencing art were drawn from wars and numerous battles led in the 16 and 17<sup>th</sup> century. In opposition to the West, where fencing examples were practiced and passed on at fencing academies, in Poland it was differently. There were no schools neither academies, knowledge was passed on from the father to the son, experience was gained in combat and on practices – so-called chases. Andrzej Opaliński published *The articles of chasing to the ring (Artykuły gonienia do pierścienia)* in 1578, where he presents the practice principles of using the hussar copy. A special kind of the duel "to the life and death", which was begun at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> and developed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was so-called "skirmish". Poles were considered to be the best skirmishers; a method of this fight was that before the battle began, several best warriors were entering the battlefield and challenged their opponents. After the challenge was accepted individual duels were led, being the show of efficiency and courage. Victory in a such fight added to honour and fame, stimulated the spirit of the fight and simultaneously was a good divination for the whole battle to come. It is worth it to mention here particularly dangerous weapon – an ice-axe which in hands of an irresponsible individual became a deadly weapon because even its accidental use could end tragically. In 1574, when Samuel Zborowski, a representative of one of the first houses belonging to the crown, killed in a quarrel Andrzej Wapowski, Przemyśl castellan with this weapon "before he managed to cover himself", lower houses of years 1578, 1601 and 1620 gave so-called laws "forbidding ice-axes", on the power of which one could carry this weapon about himself only during war or so-called "war time". Constitution of 1620 stated as follows: "Forbidding of ice-axes. Explaining former laws and statutes about safety and common peace made, and granting to the constitution anni 1578 et 1601 and alia, about forbidding unusual weaponry and arms, watching that the frolic in people grows the further the bigger, neither places consecrated, nor none superior authority taking care of: therefore, bad intentions to obviate we decide omnium Ordinum unanimi the consensus accedente that no cuiuscunque

*conditionis dare from now on not to use, or carry the ice-axes in loco publico, under the penalty of fine two hundreds ....However, during the war against the royal enemy taking ice-axes and other weaponry we keep". ("Zabronienie czekanów. Objasnijac dawne prawa i statuta okolo bezpieczenstwa i pokoju pospolitego uczynione, a przychylajac sie do konstytucji anni 1578 et 1601 i do inszych, o zabronieniu niezwyklych broni i oręza postanowionych baczac, że co dalej wieksza swawola w ludziach rośnie, ani na miejsca poświęcone, ani na żdną zwirzeczność nie ogladajac się: przeto, aby się złym zamysłem zabieażalo postanawiamy omnium Ordinum unanimi consensus accedente, aby żaden cuiuscunque conditionis nie ważył się odtąd zażywać, albo nosić czekanów in loco publico, pod winą dwóch set grzywien.... Wszakże na wojnie przeciwko nieprzyjacielowi koronnemu zażywanie czekanów i inszych broni zachowujemy".)*

Poles professed the principle "we do not exercise anything that could not be to used in combat". Such approach to training caused that the Polish martial art possessed exclusively utilitarian character and had not recognised "living room trainings", "artificial steps" and forced on stiff examples. That is why we did not take over western examples, and trainings at local academies did not find the acknowledgement in the Polish society. Even the fact that on the Polish throne sat down kings from strange states, bringing with them western fashions, did not have any larger influence on changes in the Polish fencing art. On the contrary, introduction of so-called "foreign sort" strenghtened in us conviction that Polish examples and fighting methods were more considerably effective than those western ones; which was proven in such battles as of: Kircholm, Kłuszyn, Chocim, Orsza, Vienna. There, counting comparatively few soldiers, Polish army defeated considerably numerous enemy forces, confirming this way effectiveness of Polish army and Polish martial art.

The Polish martial art reached the climax of its magnificence in the battle of Vienna in 1683, when the Polish hussars routed the Turkish camp giving the same decisive blow to the armies of Kara Mustafa Pasa. Commanding Polish armies king John III Sobieski had his contribution in the Polish martial art. During his reign an old Polish martial art "fighting with short sticks" ("bicia się w palcaty") was developed. This kind of fencing served training the noble youth to the later sabre wielding and survived as much as to beginnings of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

After the Viennese victory follows slow fall of the Polish military, neighbouring countries grow in strength, in Poland the Saxons sit on the throne, who base their power on their own Saxon army, which causes a fall of the Polish army meaning. It

experiences tough moments, its morale falls, it feels underestimated. The hussars who were at the top of their powers until recently become “the decorative cavalry”, serving mainly to illuminate ceremonies and funerals, hence the name “funeral knights”. Polish martial art is kept among those splendid soldiers, who, already aged campaigners, pass it onto their sons and grandsons, taking care about for its survival. Next to them appear persons who see the fall of the country and call to the return to the former traditions of the hussar lance. They believe strange methods contribute to the fall of the country, and only former Polish examples of the martial art are able to hold back this fall. Such a devoted follower of this case became Jan Michał Joachim Kompenhauzen, who published his famous book in Kalisz, 1737. *Glory & Apologue of the Lance & the Pikes with refutation of some accusations, against them (Chwała y Apologia Kopy y Pik cum refutatione niektórych zarzutów, przeciwko nim)*. In this book he defends strength and the battle meaning of the lance, stating this weapon should be brought back to the Polish army and to be still in use on the battlefield.

In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century on the Polish throne sits down Stanisław August Poniatowski, and together with him appears hope for the return to Polish traditions and rebirth of the Polish army. That happens so initially, the king founds Knight's School in 1765 called the Cadets' Corps. He conducts army reformation, however political disturbances, the tying of confederation in Bar and Radom ends with the entry of Russian armies to Poland, the king's dethronization and four-year-long war, in the result of which in 1772 takes place the First Partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth amongst Russia, Austria and Prussia. This is a shock for Poland, the lower house undertakes the number of reforms which are intended to calm down the situation and to lead the country out of trouble. Notably, in 1773 the Committee of National Education is created which is the first in the world official Ministry of Education. From the very beginning of its existence the Committee elaborates a number of progressive teaching programmes among which it introduces to schools “the study of fighting with short sticks” as so-called recreations. This is the first official introduction in Europe by the government of a martial art to schools as the element “supporting tradition, national spirit and also recreation”.

In 1788 begins debates so-called Four Years Lower House Gathering, which on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May, 1792 resolves constitution, the second bill in the world after the constitution of the United States which introduces the democratic system. However, not all like this and on 14<sup>th</sup> of May,

1792 the confederation in Targowica is formed. Targowicans recognised the resolutions of the Four Years Lower House Gathering an assault on the nobles' freedom and called the help of Russian armies. King Stanisław August Poniatowski came on the Russian side. Russia came to an agreement with Prussia and the second partition of Poland was executed in 1793.

The Polish nation did not agree with such a situation and began the uprising in 1794. The uprising was commanded by Tadeusz Kościuszko. The Polish army came back to the tradition of sabre and lance, however this time as part of cavalry equipment appeared spear which took over traditions of the hussar lance, copying combat techniques from this weapon. During Kosciuszko's uprising a new martial art is being born: fighting with the battle scythe. In 1794, Piotr Aigner publishes in Warsaw for insurgents' needs : *A Short study about pikes and scythes* in which he presents examples of making battle scythes and their use in combat. It becomes a famous and terrible weapon in hands of a Polish peasant, and whole Europe talks about Polish scythemen. In France the scythe becomes the Polish symbol of the fight for independence. The uprising, however, fell and the III partition of Poland took place (1795).

After the third partition Poland disappeared from the map of Europe, the Polish battle spirit did not, though. On the contrary, that time Polish martial art conquered Europe. Jan Henryk Dąbrowski creates Polish legions in 1797, and Joseph Wybicki writes Mazurek Dąbrowskiego which becomes the official anthem of Poland in 1927. Words of the anthem “We shall take back with the sabre” testify this weapon becomes a symbol of recovering our freedom. Polish martial art became again elicited from oblivion. Thanks to memory of still living soldiers who remember and know its examples it comes back to the army, where exercised by the patriotic youth reaches again a mastery level.

Hope enters into Poles when Napoléon Bonaparte comes into power in France. Poles are spell-bound by him, and so is he by Polish cavalry. There are cavalry formations created anew, which perform miracles of dexterity with the use of lance and sabre. The charge of Polish *chevau-légers* in the Somosierra ravine is particularly famous, when squadron of 125 people commanded by Hipolit Koziętulski in eight minutes opens for Napoleon the road to Madrid protected by 13 000 Spaniards and 3 guns cascades. After this victory Napoleon stood up before Polish soldiers, took off his hat and called: “*Je vous reconnais pour la the plus brave cavalerie*” /I recognise you for the most valiant cavalry/. Particularly famous in wielding the lance

is Vistula Legion and the cheveu-légiers of the guard. Napoleon finds the lance to be an archaic weapon, however when seeing Poles wielding it so effectively he agrees to introduce lances to the armament of his cavalry. Napoleon's example is followed by different armies. Almost whole Europe rearms according to Polish style. Eduard Bignon who is a diplomate in Napoleon's services gives us in his diaries following information: "*A Polish soldier is able to every kind of service, however especially in cavalry. Every peasant is born rider in Poland; therefore one can form there cavalry regiments with such easiness, as they form infantry elsewhere. Namely uhlands distinguished themselves with an excellent use of lance and gave instructors for French regiments*".

This situation changes alongside with Napoleon's fall. Hopes for full independence recovery fall. There are insurgents' sudden efforts and there is the hope for independence recovery, but Polish martial art examples disappear. A Polish soldier is trained at military schools according to strange drills and strange examples, nevertheless produces evidence the superb spirit and weapon fighting skill. The Polish cavalry aims at sabre and lance, but a Polish infantryman is no worse. Poles show prominent abilities in combat with bayonets. In 1827, despite the censorship Russian authorities agree to publish a textbook in Polish, so-called *Study presenting ways of fighting with bayonets* where are presented methods of fighting with this weapon based on Polish examples. In November 1830 an attempt to fight for independence is undertaken, and special heroism is presented by so-called 4<sup>th</sup> regiment "Czwartacy" which has no match in bayonet combat.

Those sudden efforts notwithstanding the uprising falls. The next one, in 1863, also called "January" does not bring longed-for independence as well, despite heroic fights and personal skills freedom cannot be won. Sabre, lance, battle scythe and bayonet did not manage to defeat the invaders. Hope for freedom fallen and together with it the Polish martial art. Written in that time textbooks and instructions stay only in manuscripts waiting for better times.

Not taking into consideration apathy and social discouragement, in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century on the wave of coming into being on the west fencing sport and Olympic idea, arise associations and the groups assembling the youth who practise gymnastics and force sports. In 1867 in Lvov Gymnastic Company Falcon (Sokół) came into being which led fencing sections, practices with lances, bayonet and small axe. These are attempts of the connexion to former traditions, and presented on rallies and numerous demonstrations are intended to support patriotic spirit. Ideas of GC

"Sokół" rapidly gained acknowledgement and in short time appeared its next centres in Galicia and later in Wielkopolska. However, foreign influences, especially Italian and French fencing, compete effectively with Polish traditions in absence of native examples and schools of combat. The fact of limitations forced by the invaders who did not allow to cultivate Polish traditions in this range was the additional difficulty here. Poles however did not want to forget about the Polish fencing art, in numerous periodicals appear mentions reminding about its existence, published fencing textbooks "smuggle" Polish examples, there are also attempts made to write native textbooks. Michał Starzewski writes his textbook *On Fencing* in 1830, it was made known to the public just in 1932 by his grandson. In 1879 Antoni Durski writes *School of the cutting swordplay* which stays in manuscript until today. In 1861 gets published *The cutting swordplay* which probably becomes confiscated by Russians, similarly „disappears" written approx. in 1912 by W. Hałek position *Exercises with the hatchet*, nevertheless, this is insufficient for resuscitation of the former Polish martial art. One cannot find published approx. in 1828 by Hipolit Koziatowski *Science of combatting* until now, or by the same author *Recipes for horse riding, wielding with sabre and lance for light cavalry*. By happy chance we were successful to keep published 1861 *Scythemen drill* and *Regulations for exercises with the scythe*, published in 1913.

The situation changes for better after the recovery of independence in 1918, when the Polish army comes into being and takes over the former examples of sabre, lance and short stick. Polish traditions in this scope are cultivated in the army but there also influence of foreign examples, especially sport fencing is significant.

Total withdrawal from former Polish traditions follows after the Second World War. Sabre, lance and palcat fall in oblivion. Predominant in fencing are examples promoted by Hungarian and later Soviet fencers. The situation changes just in 1981, when Zbigniew Sawicki founds in Zawiercie a section of the martial art of Bolesław the Brave (Bolesław Chrobry). This is a period which does not favour full disclosure of cultivating Polish armed traditions yet, however works in this field bring results. The Club of Former Polish Armoury Lovers and Art of Fighting with this Armoury comes into being in 1986. A name of the Polish martial art becomes invented and its emblem elaborated – Signum Polonicum. In 1990 gets published the first in the history of Poland periodical for the Polish martial arts *Tradition*, and in 1994 the Club becomes officially registered. In 2004 gets printed *The fencing treaty on art of fighting with the Polish hussar sabre – asis*, and in 2005 the

book *Short Sticks. Polish Martial Art. A textbook for novice*. In 2003 Clubs in Bydgoszcz and Łódź are created and in 2008 in Pińczów. The first foreign Club comes into being in České Budějovice in 2009. The Main Centre of Polish Martial Art Training Signum Polonicum in Zawiercie directs the Polish martial art since 2009.

## II. Profile and the main plots of the system

Because the whole question connected with the Polish martial art is unusually spacious I will focus only on hastening the art of fighting with the Polish battle sabre, called the hussar which is the most characteristic for the Polish martial art.

Józef Łepkowski in his book *Side-arms in general and in Poland considered archaeologically*, 1857, wrote: “*Polish wielding the sabre differs from ways known to the rest of Europe completely. It possesses its own propriety and special nomenclature – cross-shaped art, Rejowskie cuts, Referendarskie and others, different principles from the German and French school of fencing. In this matter a fencing master Mr Starzewski, giving these teachings in Cracow, prepared an interesting and useful manuscript*”.

Indeed, many spoke and wrote in the 19<sup>th</sup> century about the famous *Polish cross-shaped art* which made up basis of the old Polish fencing art, elaborated alongside with creation of the Polish battle sabre called hussar. Initially, the name “cross-shaped art” was taken from the custom fencers were drawing sign of the cross on the ground before the fight. Later the cross-shaped art was thought to come from the cross-guard in the sabre type called karabela; therefore the development of the Polish fencing art was associated with appearing of this sabre. Eventually, prevailed opinions that the cross-shaped art came from the kind of blocks and cuts which are based on the shape of cross and were applied this way. Today we know this last statement is the closest to the truth, notably it is supported with fencing examples using battle horse. This art lasted till the 19<sup>th</sup> century in quiet narrow form. There still were “places” in the 18<sup>th</sup> century where former hetmans’ tradition and the Polish martial art were kept. The last Polish hetman who kept former examples was Klemens Branicki.

One should say here that our ancestors were famous of the use of the sabre, in particular Gabryel Modliszewski, about whose Paprocki writes so: “... *he was a great man and uncommon fencer, with his hand so exact, that a small coin cut the from the boy’s head, he did not move a hair...*”. Equally efficient in the sabre was Tomasz Olędzki, Zakroczym castellan, who *five thalers, laid one on another, chopped with*

*sabre*. There were famous “tests of the sabre”, i.e. cutting bread loaves, cutting off door handles, cutting declining silk handkerchiefs, so-called “test of water” etc.

Recreation of the Polish fencing art itself was not a simple matter. Poland was under annexations and could not freely cultivate national traditions, especially fencing. An additional difficulty was here the fact that the Polish martial art had not been practised in halls and had not worked out sport examples, as it was common in the west of Europe. Being given birth from war experiences and adapted for combat, it did not know any example but the battle. It was an effective barrier making its recreation and practising impossible in the conditions Poland found itself under annexations. Poles did not want to create its sport example, believed in the recovering of independence and to such a fight prepared the Polish fencing art. At first they intended to develop it in supposed to come into being Polish army. Because this did not happen, began activities aiming to “smuggle” old Polish fencing examples in textbooks, teachings and fencing classes led in “Sokół”, at universities and in various kinds of associations. Fundamental work on the old Polish sabre fencing was drawn in the manuscript by Michał Starzewski in 1830, who taught sabre fencing in that time. He did not publish his work, however during classes he acquainted the youth with its characteristic features. He took teachings from his father who was a master of the “fighting with short sticks” art, and as a young participant of the November uprising Starzewski picked additional experiences and practically checked the Polish fencing art in combat with invaders’ army. He qualified names of 12 basic cuts, dividing them into *in-hand* (w ręcznej) and *in-core* (rdzennej) ones. He introduced old Polish nomenclature and onomastics to fencing, elaborated division of body sides and explained the principle of “*in-core cuts’ point*”. In the Polish martial art the body is divided into a perpendicular plan and not horizontal as in other martial arts. He self-characterized the most famous Polish cut so-called “*devilish Polish fourth*”. This cut, called in old Polish *nyżkiem*, also alias *senatorial cut*, was the special Polish sign in sabre fencing. This is confirmed by *Meyers Konversations-Lexicon*, published in 1885-1892 (v. 9, p. 158), where characterizing the *nyżkiem* cut encyclopedists call it: “*Die polnische Quart*”.

How great a master Michał Starzewski was let it be testified by this event he describes, and which took place in Paris in 1857.

“*Being in Paris, I went in acquaintances’ company to the public fencing tournament once. Various fencing masters fought with one another on the scene of the*

theatre using backwords, épées and foils. In backword assault the winner, profusely applauded by the public, got himself so merry, that when applauses stopped for one moment, he proposed a fight to everyone from the public who wanted to compete with him. This was the only my companions needed. They simply began to push me on the scene in a loud manner and so demonstratively that soon the public also began to demand insistingly my pronouncement. No other way I had to accept the challenge.

The meeting looked entertainingly. My enemy in fencing dress, me – in visiting dress, in long, tight frock-coat and scarf on my neck. The public was very delighted by this view, and I was outraged, being presented, as the circus clown, to public derision. It all concentrated on the innocent Frenchman. I knocked him clean into next week, thoroughly, according to the all rules of the art. Maybe even, as on the peaceful trial, a bit too strongly. The public went mad from the joy”.

Apart from Starzewski, Antoni Durski, a prominent activist of Sokół undertook the attempt to elaborate a study of fencing with Polish nomenclature and Polish example. He began writing his work entitled *School of the cutting swordplay* in 1879, however it was not finished and published. This school clearly links to the examples of the fight with short sticks rather than to classic fencing with the battle sabre, but it surely continues the Polish example. Earlier, in 1861, a textbook *Cutting Swordplay* appeared with 4 charts; it was probably confiscated by Russian authorities, though.

The first official Polish textbook in which are given fencing examples practised at the military schools of the Austrian annexation is published by Kazimierz Bryła in Stanisławowo in 1888. The textbook is titled *The progressive fencer that is Polish textbook for teaching of fencing with double sided épée*. The value of this textbook are names of techniques and the commands passed in Polish and linking to the Polish tradition. Blocks are called parades which is straight connexion to the old Polish fencing art.

Old Polish onomastics used by Starzewski is confirmed by Karol Bernolak, who in 1898 publishes in Chrynów his *Fencing Textbook and short description of the Polish sabre*. Similarly to Starzewski, he gives old Polish names of cuts: *in vertical, in saddle-bow, in cheeks, in the middle, from the bottom* and their equivalents in Italian, French and German fencing. He clearly identifies the old Polish fencing art on the background of various fencing schools in this way.

Attempts to qualify and present examples of the old Polish sabre fencing are made on the whole of Poland under all annexations. The decisive year is here 1899, during which several interesting works

and articles in the field of fencing appeared. In 1899 Maryan Olszewski in the periodical *The Cyclist, Oarsman and Skater* calls openly to the practice of Polish sabre fencing, brings closer its principles, describes especially the cross-shaped art and gives the old Polish onomastics.

In the same year doctor Stanisław Turning gives out in Cracow a textbook *Fencing with side-arms*, in which as he claims alone: “*What concerns school chosen by us, then assuming that for the skilful fencer, no cut or block applied by the enemy should be a surprise; we teach the object encompassed within the work hereby, regarding two main methods, namely French and German; we did not fail to consider the former Polish school as well, if that can be used with today’s weapon and in present relations*”.

Tokarski confirms with these last words that the former Polish school existed indeed, however its use / remarkably battle-like, and not sport-like/ encounters difficulties in the contemporary socially-political situation and cannot be practised as an independent one. Nonetheless he succeeds in “restoring” old Polish examples of curved cuts, cut with the spine - most seldom applied in sport fencing, and cuttings and illusions. The whole example in the “Polish part” clearly links to the short stick fencing presented in pictures by Edmund Cenar in the textbook to gymnastics – *Gymnastic practices with the iron cane, wooden cane and the pole. Systematic outline for school and sociable gymnastics (Lvov, 1889)*.

Unfortunately, in spite of undertaken attempts creation of the uniform pattern of the old Polish martial art remains unsuccessful. Michał Starzewski dies in 1894, and together with with him hope for the rebirth of the full example of this martial art. Although in 1908 J. Żytny publishes *Short outline of fencing with sabres according to the Italian system*, but in the very title there is described – not Polish – fencing school presented by the author. *School of fencing* by B. Z. Gnoiński, published in 1909 is similar – it is hard to find Polish examples in it. The problem was that different examples of sabres had been in force then: in the army it was an example of sabre elaborated in the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginnings of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and for “the civilian” was in force example of the sport sabre. Both examples underwent continuous modifications, but they surely were not those old Polish battle sabres; that is why recreation of the old Polish fencing art was not entirely possible.

Quite incapable attempt to present the Polish fencing example is made by Kazimierz Laskowski in 1912, calling it *Combat with sabres, that is backwords, after so-called Polish school*. It is information about fencing narrowly gathered from well-known Polish fencing textbooks, mainly from Gnoiński and Żytny, having very loose relation to the Polish sabre fencing.

What is doubtless interesting in it though, is an example of the Polish cross-shaped cuts called the “*rose of sabre cuts*” which proves Laskowski used some source having a connection with old Polish sabre fencing or with fencing former in general.

Later Polish authors connected with sabre fencing as Sobolewski (1920) or Mańkowski (1927) go away entirely from the Polish example and devote themselves to foreign fencing which develops more and more forcing on foreign examples, principles and training methods.

The breakthrough became just in the half of the 80s of the last century, when Zbigniew Sawicki, collected accessible material, began practical trainings and reconstructed Polish martial art which he named *Signum Polonicum*. He realized in this way a “will” of many generations of Poles who did not have possibility and time to close knowledge of their own and their ancestors into one training system, creating the school of the Polish martial art.

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## Polska Sztuka Walki – Signum Polonicum: Tło historyczne, charakterystyka i główne wątki systemu

Słowa kluczowe: rycerze, kawaleria, husaria

Pierwsza część artykułu przybliży wpływy innych kultur oraz tło historyczne, na którego tle kształtowały się polskie sztuki walki.



Od samego początku Polacy preferowali wojowanie na koniu, co szczególnie zostało uwidocznione w okresie średniowiecza, kiedy to podstawą wojska polskiego stała się konnica.

Pod koniec XV wieku Polska znalazła się w silnym zagrożeniu idącym ze wschodu i południa, głównie za sprawą Tatarów i Turków. Zachód rozwijał piechotę zbrojąc ją w piki i muszkiety, a w miejsce miecza wprowadził rapier. Inaczej było w Polsce. Podstawą był wojownik konny, który musiał pokonywać wielkie przestrzenie i walczyć z przeciwnikiem różnej narodowości reprezentującym różne metody walki. Musiał być szybki i skuteczny w walce. Podobnie więc jak na zachodzie, polski rycerz odrzucił miecz i ciężkozbrojny pancerz, ale swoją siłę oparł nie na broni palnej ale na krzywej szabli i kopii, która stała się lżejsza niż rycerska, ale za to znacznie skuteczniejsza i poręczniejsza w walce.

Przemiana ta nastąpiła w XVI wieku, który zapoczątkował narodziny i rozwój staropolskiej sztuki wojennej, a tym samym i sztuki walki. Ustrój polityczny jaki panował w naszym kraju spowodował, że uchwalenie podatków na wojsko było sprawą niezwykle trudną. Szlachta nie chciała dobrowolnie opodatkowywać siebie i tym samym ciężar utrzymania wojska spadał na króla. W efekcie wojska było mało, co paradoksalnie miało wpływ na rozwój sztuki walki. Ta mała liczba wojska braku w liczebności musiała nadrabiać jakością i sprawnością w walce. W efekcie tego powstały formacje jazdy, które osiągnęły znakomitą wartość bojową: husaria, pancerni, lisowczyce, żołnierze obrony potocznej.

Apogeum swej świetności polska sztuka walki osiągnęła w bitwie pod Wiedniem 1683 roku kiedy to polska husaria rozniosła w puch obóz turecki zadając tym samym decydujący cios wojskom Kara Mustafy. Dowodzący wojskami król polski Jan III Sobieski miał swój wkład w polską sztukę walki. To za jego panowania rozwinęła się staropolska sztuka „bicia się w palcaty”, czyli walka na krótkie kije. Ten rodzaj szermierki służył zaprawianiu młodzieży szlacheckiej do późniejszego władania szablą i przetrwał aż do początków XIX wieku.

Po drugim rozbiore Polski gdy naród polski nie zgodził się z takim stanem rzeczy rozpoczęto w 1794 r. powstanie, na czele którego stanął Tadeusz Kościuszko. Polskie wojsko wróciło do tradycji szabli i kopii. Tym razem jednak zamiast kopii na wyposażeniu kawalerii pojawiła się lanca. Po trzecim rozbiore Polska znikła z mapy Europy, jednak nie zniknął polski duch bojowy.

Nadzieja wstępuje w Polaków, gdy we Francji władzę obejmuje Napoleon Bonaparte. Tworzone są formacje jazdy, które z użyciem lancy i szabli dokonują cudów zręczności. Szczególnie słynna jest szarża polskich szwoleżerów w wąwozie Somosierra. Sytuacja ta zmienia się wraz z upadkiem Napoleona. Nadzieje na odzyskanie pełnej niepodległości upadają. Czynnione są zrywy powstańcze i jest nadzieja na odzyskanie niepodległości, ale polskie wzory sztuki walki zanikają. Jednak pomimo tych zrywów powstanie upada. Kolejne powstanie roku 1863 zwanego styczniowym również nie przynosi upragnionej niepodległości, pomimo bohaterkich walk i osobistych umiejętności nie udaje się wywalczyć wolności. Szabla, lanca, kosa bojowa i bagnet nie zdołały pokonać zaborców. Nadzieja na wolność upadła

a wraz z nią i upadła polska sztuka walki. Pomimo istniejącej apatii i zniechęcenia społecznego, w drugiej połowie XIX wieku na fali powstającego na zachodzie sportu szermierczego i idei olimpijskiej, tworzą się stowarzyszenia i grupy skupiające młodzież uprawiająca gimnastykę i sporty siłowe.

Po drugiej wojnie światowej następuje całkowite odejście od dawnych polskich tradycji. Szabla, lanca i palcat przechodzą w zapomnienie. Sytuacja zmienia się dopiero w 1981 roku, kiedy to Zbigniew Sawicki zakłada w Zawierciu sekcję sztuki walki im. Bolesława Chrobrego. W 1986 roku powstaje Klub Miłośników Dawnego Oręża Polskiego i Sztuki Walki tym Orężem. Wymyślona zostaje nazwa polskiej sztuki walki – Signum Polonicum i opracowany zostaje znak – godło. W 1990 roku zostaje wydane pierwsze w dziejach polski czasopismo polskich sztuk walki Tradycja, a w roku 1994 Klub zostaje oficjalnie zarejestrowany. Od 2009 roku polską sztuką walki kieruje Centralny Ośrodek Szkolenia Polskiej Sztuki Walki Signum Polonicum w Zawierciu.

W drugiej części autor koncentruje się na przybliżeniu sztuki walki z użyciem polskiej szabli bojowej zwanej husarską, która jest najbardziej charakterystyczna dla polskiej sztuki walki.

Początkowo, nazwę „sztuka krzyżowa” brano z tego, że przed walką szermierze kreślili znak krzyża na ziemi. Później sadzono, że sztuka krzyżowa pochodzi od jelca krzyżowego jaki występuje przy szabli zwanej karabelą, stąd kojarzono rozwój polskiej sztuki szermierczej z pojawieniem się tej właśnie szabli. W końcu jednak przeważały poglądy, że sztuka krzyżowa pochodzi od rodzaju zasłon i cięć, które oparte są na wzorze krzyża i tak też były stosowane. Sztuka ta dotrwała do XIX wieku w dość okrojonej formie. Fundamentalne dzieło z zakresu staropolskiej szermierki szablowej skreślił w rękopisie w 1830 roku Michał Starzewski, który nauczał szermierki szablowej w ówczesnej czasie. To on określił nazwy 12 podstawowych cięć, dzieląc ją na *wręczne* i *rdzenne*. On wprowadził terminologię staropolską i nazewnictwo do szermierki, dokonał podziału stron ciała i objaśnił zasadę „punktu rdzennych cięć”. W polskiej sztuce walki podział ciała dokonany jest w płaszczyźnie pionowej a nie poziomej tak jak w innych sztukach walki. To on scharakteryzował najsłynniejsze polskie cięcie tzw. „diabelską polską czwartą”. Cięcie to zwane po staropolsku *nyżkiem*, lub też *cięciem senatorskim*, było swoistym znakiem polskim w szermierce szablowej.

Poza Starzewskim, próbę opracowania szermierki z terminologią polską i polskim wzorem podjął się wybitny działacz Sokoła, Antoni Durski. W 1879 roku rozpoczął pisanie swojej pracy pt. *Szkoła szermierki siecznej*, jednak nie została ona ukończona i opublikowana.

Niestety, pomimo podejmowanych prób nie udaje się stworzyć jednolitego wzorca staropolskiej sztuki szermierczej. W 1894 roku umiera Michał Starzewski, a wraz z nim nadzieja na odrodzenie pełnego wzoru tej sztuki walki.

Późniejsi polscy autorzy związani z szermierką szablową jak Sobolewski (1920) czy Mańkowski (1927) całkowicie odchodzą od wzoru polskiego i poświęcają się szermierce zagranicznej, która rozwija się coraz bardziej narzucając obcy wzór, zasady i metody szkoleniowe.