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Elements of martial arts in the programme of Gymnastic Association „Sokół” (1867–1914) / Elementy sztuk walki w Towarzystwie Gimnastycznym „Sokół” (1867–1914)

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“Sokół” members and the contemporary historians as well agree as to the reasons of creating the Polish “Sokół”. Under the cover of gymnastic exercises, numbers of young Poles were prepared for the future battle for their homeland’s freedom. Apart from gymnastic exercises, which were the basis of the Association’s programme, there occurred elements of martial arts and exercises of defensive, military and utilitarian character. There were practised, among others, hand fighting and with the use of such facilities as: cold steel, shaft weapon, wrestling, free fencing (prime version of kick boxing), combination of free fencing and wrestling (contemporary ultimate fighting), wrestling exercises (direct, or with the use of facilities), elements of military training: military drilling, throwing a knife, a javelin etc. at a target. Some of the mentioned competitions were (e.g. fencing and wrestling) were permanent points in the Association’s activity programme. Activities of military character started to appear in “Sokół” since 1889. With The First World War approaching, their popularity and significance started to grow. The reason for such changes in the sports activity of “Sokół” was the political atmosphere prevailing at the beginning of the 20th century. That time was turbulent as the states of the trilateral agreement and the trilateral alliance rapidly increased the size of their armies what heralded an outbreak of a military conflict soon. The Polish nation had then a real opportunity to recover their independence. In such a context military and utilitarian skills were most useful what obviously was reflected in the evolution of the competitiveness programmes of the Polish “Sokół”.

Introduction

Gymnastic Association ”Sokół” (“Falcon”) is often described as the „cradle” of the contemporary sports. Several sports disciplines search its roots within the Association and their development in Poland has often been connected with the activity of “Sokół”. Among numerous forms of physical activities, a particular role within the Association is played by martial arts and activities of defensive, military and utilitarian character. Some of them e.g. fencing and wrestling were indispensable elements of the competitiveness programmes of the Polish members of “Sokół”.

The said work is to present the activities, competitions and defensive sports disciplines practised in “Sokół” and to show the process of how the Association’s programme evolved as far as martial arts are concerned in the years 1867–1914. The first time limit refers to establishing the first “falcon’s nest” on the Polish territory (in Lvov). The final limit is connected with the outbreak of the First World War.

The thesis consists of four parts. The first part focuses on the genesis of creating Gymnastic Association “Sokół” on the Polish territory. The second analyses the “falcon’s system” with particular concern on martial arts. The third part includes information on activities of military and utilitarian character covered by the Association’s programme. The last part describes the evolution of arms within “Sokół” as far as technology is concerned. The ending provides some conclusions and summary of the presented subject.

I

Despair and downheartedness spread within the Polish society after the uprising of 1863 was bloodily put down. Subsequent cruel repressions weakened the strength of the nation and made many doubt in recovering independence. There were heard many voices condemning political romanticism and the idea of uprising, voices calling for abandoning independence “chimeras” and putting the whole strength into material rebuilt of the nation [Terech 1932, p. 5] – this is how Michał Terech, a distinguished “Sokół” member, depicted the situation of the Polish society after the failure of the 1863 uprising. That was the moment when the idea of establishing “Sokół” appeared.



Fot. 1. Budynek TG „Sokół” w Rzeszowie (ok. 1913 r.) / Association in Rzeszów (ca. 1913) [źródło: Ze zbiorów St. Zaborniaka]

The aims and forms of activity of the Association were not accidental. Under the aegis of gymnastic activities, young Poles were prepared to future fight for independence (...) *Gymnastics and sports can be perceived as a passion a young man is deeply engaged in. However, under “the cover” of such interests there can be hidden other, more important aims needed by the nation during the years of slavery [Wolańczyk 1927 p. 1].* These ideas were initially “camouflaged” but with time they became obvious for everyone and with the oncoming war, they began to be presented in public: *“(...) The idea of Sokół can be understood only as an idea of Poland’s independence.(...) For this aim the Association transformed its programme, this aim is also realised through verbal and active promotion of physical education which is not treated as art for art’s sake”.*

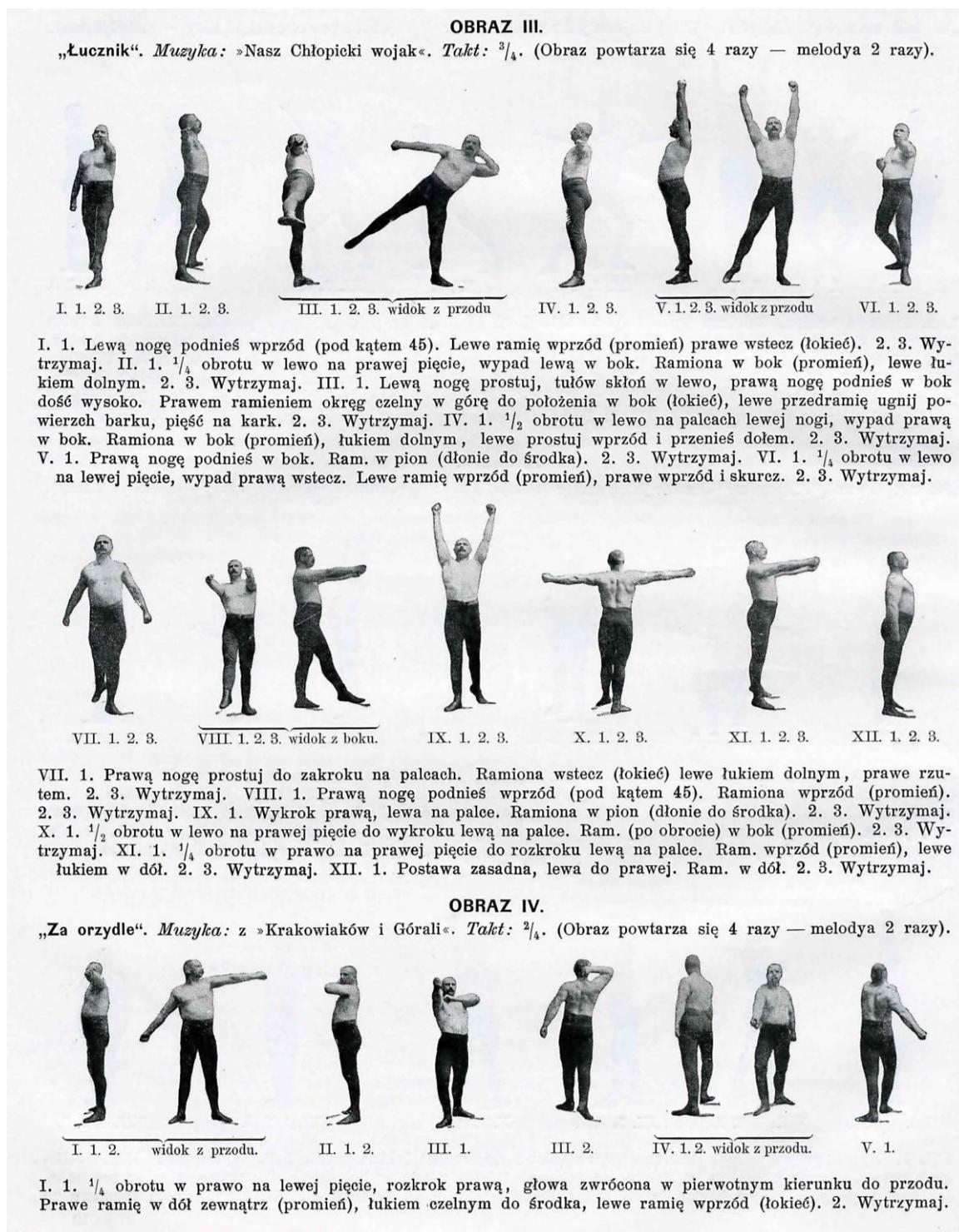
Considering the behavioural aspect¹, the reason for establishing „Sokół” and the presence of defensive competitions within its programme, was thus an obvious and indisputable thing. Both “Sokół” members and the contemporary historians are unanimous in this point [See e.g. Bach 1939; Ponczek 1987; Dudek 1994; Snopko 1997].

As far as functionality is concerned (covering the analysis of the military systems and the training procedures), the role of the general preparation should be highlighted, which resulted from gymnastics being the basis of the whole programme of the Association [Bill, Rybiński 1967, p.20]. Within a large division of gymnastic² activities of the ”Sokół” system (designed by the Lvov „Sokół” lead by Antoni Durski in 1881), there are 12 sections with divided groups and subgroups of activities. Four of them (sections: I, III, IV and VI) are of martial arts’ or defensive, military and utilitarian character.

¹ Hopology (Greek hopology) is a science on aggressive (military) human behaviours. It covers the following aspects: behavioural aspect – studies social, cultural and religious conditions influencing occurrence of human behaviours with respect to fighting; functional aspect- covers military analysis and ways of training warriors and soldiers; technological aspect – discusses kinds of arms and defensive weaponry, studies environmental features influencing gun production, materials used to produce arms etc.

² The word *gymnastics* at the time of “Sokół” was similarly comprehended as in the ancient times, as the whole range of physical education (set of exercises influencing increasing fitness, covering all theory on physical education).

Section I (activities done without equipment, without the help or resistance of colleagues i.e. activities that anyone can perform without any assisting means) covers so called "row" activities (sports-military drill). These exercises consisted in arranging the practising units in one ordered way who could move only in a determined way.



Ryc. 1. Ćwiczenia wolne (fragment układu na Sokoli Zlot Grunwaldzki w 1910 r.) / **Pic. 1.** Free exercises (a fragment of the system prepared for the Sokół Members Meeting in Grunwald- in 1910).

[źródło: Ze zbiorów PTG „Sokół” Kraków]

Section III (covering exercises performed without any sports equipment but with resistance of practising colleagues) covered 6 groups:

- 1) resistance exercises (it was not supposed to be a fight; it aimed at leading to intensive work of muscles)
 - a) one practising man tries to make a move and the other one opposes him
 - b) one practising man tries to hold a given position and the other tries to move him out of this position
- 2) wrestling-like exercises where there are two practising men as opponents of similar weight and level of physical abilities and they measure the level of their strength
- 3) fighting aimed at defeating an opponent
- 4) wrestling aimed at defeating an opponent and putting him down to the ground so that he was no longer able to fight (*These were versatile exercises, strengthening arms, trunk and legs, developing agility, courage and perseverance*).
- 5) free fencing – one tries to defeat an opponent by using arms and legs and at the same time he tries to avoid the opponent's blows
- 6) joined wrestling and free fencing.

Section IV covered exercises without equipment or resistance of colleagues but with minor equipment. Exercises were performed using movable equipment as means of assistance; there were two groups:

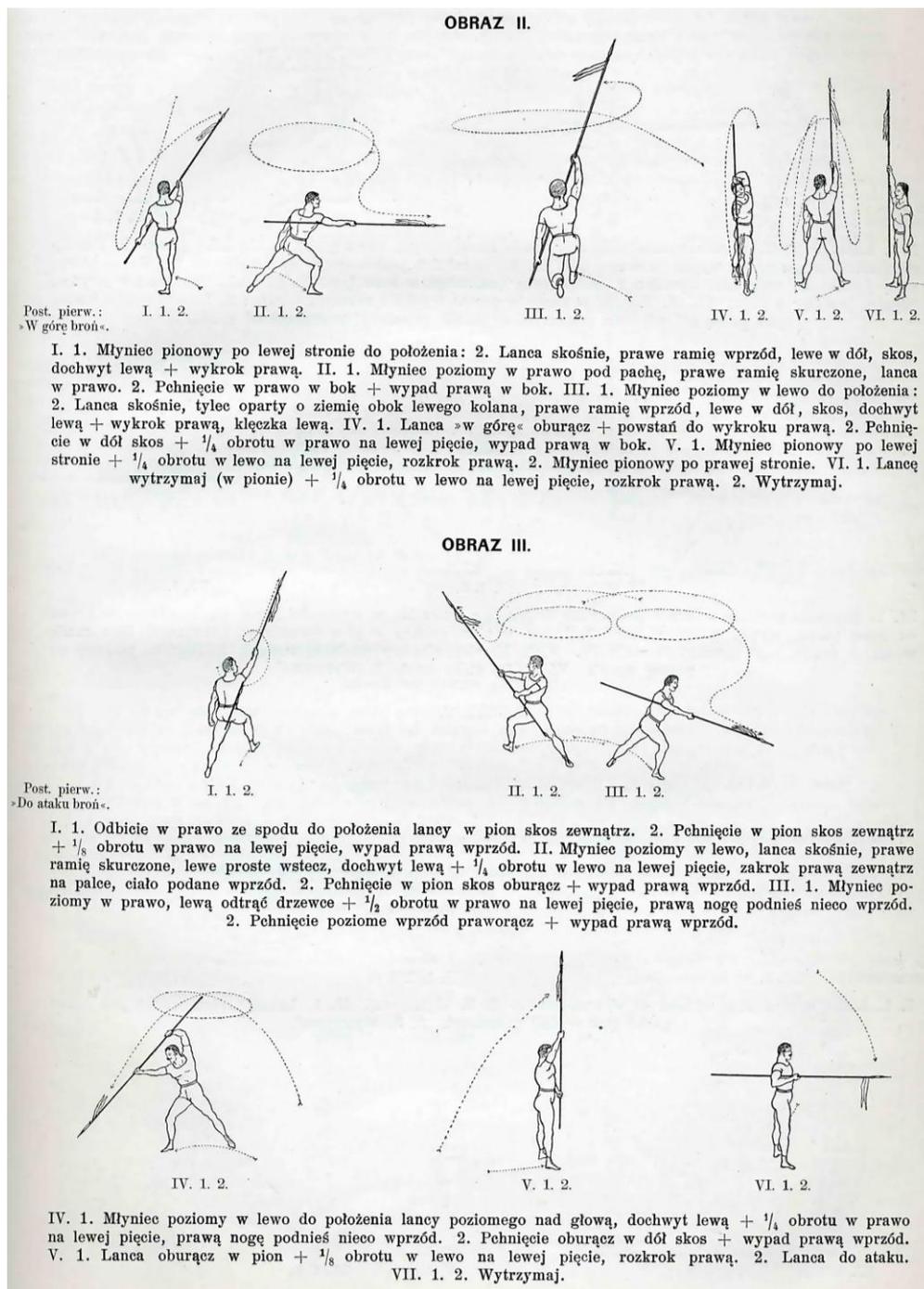
- 1) Exercises in which equipment is continuously needed. Such equipment covers, among others: wooden and iron sticks, weights, so called "stretchers" and other.
- 2) exercises in which pieces of equipment were thrown in order to reach a given target or reach as high as one can
 - a) exercises in which pieces of equipment are thrown using the muscle strength (weights, balls, balloons, javelins, rings, knives)
 - b) exercises in which pieces of equipment are thrown indirectly by means of elements improving the force of throwing
 - c) shooting.

Section VI covers exercises performed without equipment but with the use of minor equipment and resistance of colleagues. It is divided into 4 groups:

- 1) exercises with minor equipment using resistance
- 2) wrestling exercises by means of minor equipment, where one has to defeat an opponent
- 3) fighting with the use of minor equipment
- 4) fencing with the use of minor equipment:
 - a) fencing with sticks
 - b) with broadswords
 - c) with swords
 - d) with bayonets
 - e) with knives and daggers
 - f) with lances, spears and javelins
 - g) fencing with the use of mixed weapon
 - h) fencing with the use of double weapon.

The above division shows the crucial role of defensive, military and utilitarian exercises in the programme of "Sokół". Here are examples of such exercises:

- Manual fighting with the use of minor equipment: fencing with cold steel and shaft weapon, wrestling, free fencing (a prototype of kick boxing), mixture of free fencing and wrestling (contemporary ultimate fighting),
- Wrestling exercises (indirect or with the use of minor equipment) that develop strength, perseverance and agility,
- Elements of military art: a drill, shooting (to a movable and standing target) throwing at targets with a knife, javelin etc.



Ryc. 2. Ćwiczenia z lancą (fragment układu na Sokoli Złot Grunwaldzki w 1910 r.) / **Pic. 2.** Exercises with a lance (a fragment of the system prepared for the Sokół Members Meeting in Grunwald - in 1910).
[źródło: Ze zbiorów PTG „Sokół” Kraków]

Special attention should be put to fencing; it was, apart from gymnastics, the first competition introduced into the Association's programme. Fencing was not limited to fighting with the use of a sword or a foil. Other types of weapon were also used here: shaft weapons (spears, javelins) and combinations of weapons using mixed weapons or with the use of two weapons. Another popular kind of direct confrontation among the "Sokół" members was trunk and arms wrestling. Wrestling and fencing were present in the agendas of numerous sports events of the Polish "Sokół" (e.g. in 1891, 1892, 1898, 1900, 1901, 1909). Apart from fencing, cold steel and shaft weapon were also used during so called *common exercises*. These exercises consisted in performing simple movements with a piece of weapon held in hands by a group of several mem-

bers at the same time (during mass presentations, such a group consisted of a few hundred or even a few thousand men³): ascents, descents, bends, lunges, asrtides, dodges, cuts, thrusts, kneeling, turns etc.



Fot. 2. Polscy „Sokoli” w trakcie zlotu Wszechsokolego w Pradze w 1901 / **Photo 2.** The Polish “Sokół” Members during the General Meeting of Sokół Members in Prague in 1901.
[źródło: Ze zbiorów PTG „Sokół” Kraków]

These kinds of exercises became popular in “Sokół” especially at the beginning of the XX century and were a core element of “Sokół” meetings and gymnastic competitions. During the competitions the following types of weapon were present: lances⁴, javelins⁵, scythes⁶, swords⁷, clubs⁸, perches⁹, hatches¹⁰, alpenstocks¹¹, dumb-bells¹², maces¹³, iron and wooden rods¹⁴ [Bielec 2002].

³ Mass character of this type of exercises reflects the example of the V Jubilee Sokół General Meeting in Cracow in 1910. In the free gymnastic exercises 3343 scouts and 640 girl scouts took part.

⁴ Szczęsny Ruciński, the head of the Cracow’s Sokół, created a lance. “Przegląd Gimnastyczny” (hereinafter called PG) (1897–1901), Cracow, 1901, p. 176. *A lance – a rod made of soft wood, 2,5–2,6 metres long, 3 centimetres thick, with a sharp tip at one end and a blunt back. Under the tip there is a white-purplish red flag attached, 15 centimetres wide, 60 centimetres long cut serrated. The middle of a lance is marked with a line.* PG 1901, p. 7, “Przewodnik Gimnastyczny «Sokół»” (referred to in this work as PGS) (1881–1914), Lvov, 1901, chapter XX, p. 176. Exercises with a lance covered: primary postures (e.g. shoulder arms, leg arms) and so called maneuvering a lance (thrusts, moulinets, eights etc.). “Ćwiczenia lancą”, a supplement to PGS 1909, chapter XXIX, no. 8, p. 12.

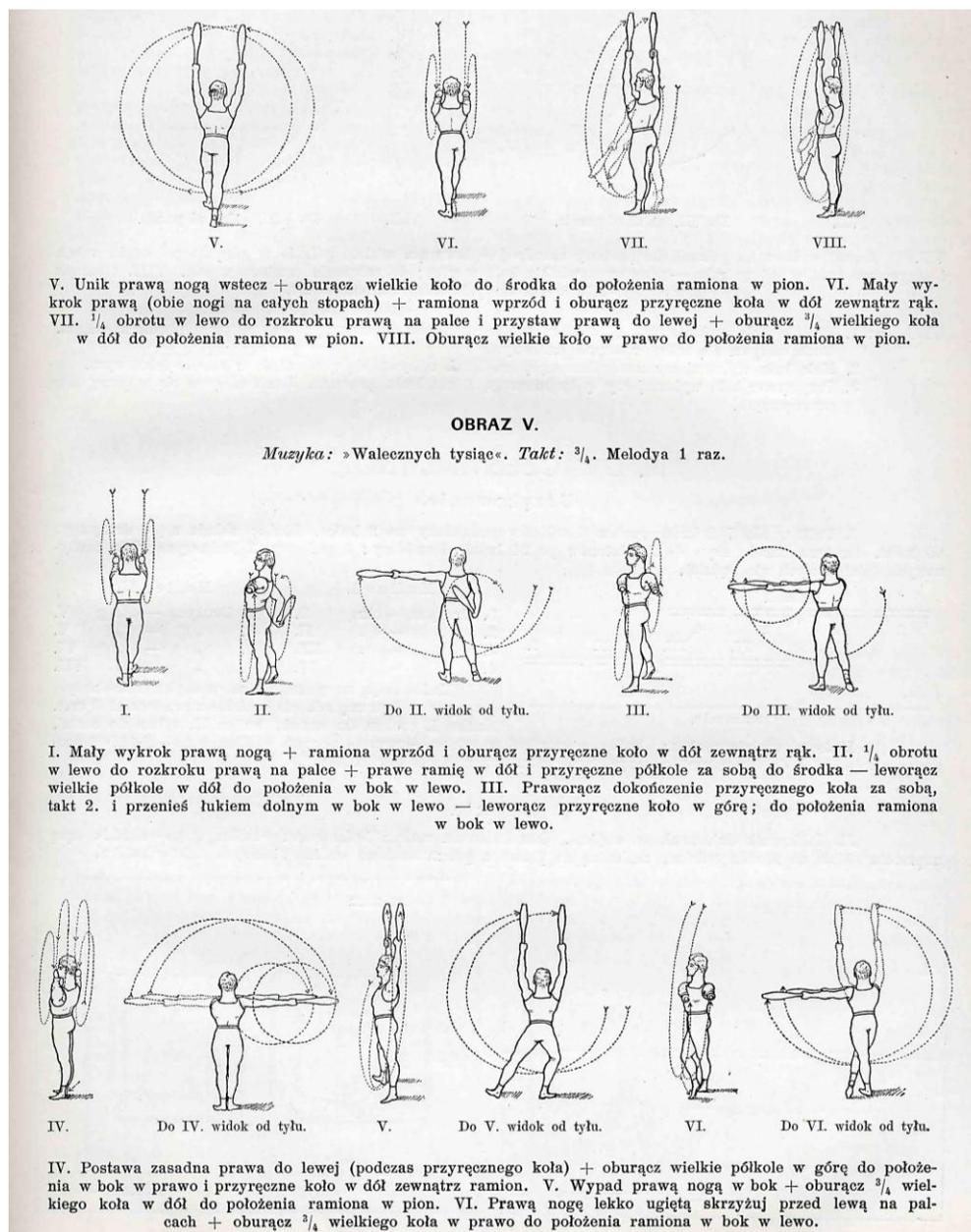
⁵ *It was a rod 1,5 metre long, of a diameter of 3 centimetres with a sharp ferrule or a thickening and a cut on one end and three wings on the other.* PGS 1890, chapter X, p. 19.

⁶ Postures with scythes (turns, lunges, astrides) and several pushes and cuts. PGS 1910, p. 50, PGS 1901, chapter XI, p. 3. “Ćwiczenia kosą jako gimnastyka narodowa”, Ruciński S., Cracow 1901, p. 3.

⁷ The idea of incorporating a sword into common practising performed at the general meetings of Sokół came from Włodzimierz Świątkiewicz, a head officer. The system was based on connecting four different cuts, covers and ripostes with changing places. PGS 1980, chapter XXVIII, p. 82.

⁸ PGS 1982, chapter XXII, p. 16.

⁹ *A perch made of soft wood, 5 metres long and 5 centimetres thick. Up to four members practised at one perch. The exercises consisted in: lunges, dodges, kneeling, turns and synchronised arm exercising : gripping, throwing, fetching a perch etc.* Such exercises were promoted by a Sokół head officer Długopolski, J. in Tarnów. “Przegląd Sokoli” 1910 (further: PS), no. 7, p. 38.



Ryc. 3. Ćwiczenia z maczugami (fragment układu na Sokoli Złot Grunwaldzki w 1910 r.) / **Pic. 3.** Exercises with clubs (a fragment of the system prepared for the Sokół Members Meeting in Grunwald - in 1910).
 [źródło: Ze zbiorów PTG „Sokół” Kraków]

The main aim of the exercises with defensive objects was to develop discipline and ability to handle a weapon. The authors of these exercises wanted to create their own, original form of competitions that would highlight the distinction and rich military traditions of the Polish na-

¹⁰ The weight of a hatchet with a handle (made of birch wood, 40 centimetres long) is 1 kg (the head and the handle is $\frac{2}{3}$ of 1kg and the blade is $\frac{1}{3}$ kg). "Rzut toporkiem", PGS 1909, chapter XXIX, p. 56. apart from throwing, a hatchet was used in common practising (like other equipment): "Ćwiczenia toporkiem wraz z tańcem górali i góralek tatrzańskich", Połomski, Sz., PGS 1910, chapter XXX, p. 51.

¹¹ Szczęsny Połomski was the author of exercises with alpenstocks. PGS 19113, chapter XXXIII, p. 53, PS 1909, p. 10.

¹² PGS 1885, chapter V, p. 82.

¹³ The Polish Sokół members usually used maces in two colours (one was white and the other was red). PGS 1892, chapter XII, p. 17. After 1908 there rarely occurred exercises with one two-hand mace. PS 1909, no. 9, p. 1.

¹⁴ Iron rods were usually used in common practising and the wooden ones were used for pushing through. PGS 1890, chapter X, p. 6, 9 and 19.

tion¹⁵. Some of the above mentioned types of weapon were also used in competitions of throwing at targets with e.g. javelins, hatchets and knives¹⁶.

Some of the exercises involving wrestling had various forms: from simple “hand wrestling” to wrestling with the use of different pieces of equipment: ropes and belts¹⁷, perches¹⁸, rods¹⁹ and sticks. The first two consisted in pulling an opponent or opponents (wrestling was also performed in groups) onto a defined area by means of a rope held in hands or fixed to a sackcloth strap. The remaining equipment served to push an opponent backwards outside a line made on a surface.

III

A crucial role in the Association’s programme was played by elements of military education which started to be introduced in 1889 and became an obligatory part of trainings of “Sokół” members. The military character of “Sokół” exercises became especially visible at the beginning of the second decade of the 20th century. With the First World War approaching, military competitions were becoming popular and significant. It was reflected in the programme of “Sokół”. That can be proved by a citation of 1913 concerning The Sixteenth Kościuszko Annual Competitions: (...) *military exercises present among other competitions since 1889 became more obvious as to the content and participation, thanks to introducing maneuvers into the group of permanent activities of Sokół* [Przegląd Sokoli]. “Sokół” teams were especially significant in this case. The first such structures appeared in each falcon’s nest in 1911. The activity of the nests consisted in grouping active youth into separate practising units where the basis was: drilling with maneuvers, learning about weapons and shooting²⁰. As a result of having military preparation, the Association’s Management made a decision of 10 December 1912 on appointing so called Permanent Sokół Troops [Dudek 1994, p.15–16].

One of the basic forms of military training within the Association were maneuvers. Its prime version – already in “Sokół” in 19th century, were all kinds of common exercises (with or without equipment). Therefore, it was recommended to *frequently practise quadruple groups as well as spread and join these groups*. In order to signal the subsequent arrangements and marching routes (starting and finishing exercises, changing groups, leaving a pitch etc) there were used commands practised while maneuvers e.g. *attention!*, *form two lines!*, *for change!*, *march forwards!* [“Przewodnik Gimnastyczny «Sokół»”].

Shooting was an important element of training falcons. During practice falcons usually used a Manlicherowski rifle. The training men usually shot from the distance of 200 metres to a stable target (a shield of one-metre diameter) or to a movable target. There were also trainings using a small-caliber pistol (6 millimetres) with shooting from the distance of 25 to 50 metres to a stable or movable target.

Apart from abilities to use a weapon, it was vital to have some tactic abilities. Therefore, there were done simulations of fights e.g. fanning out the groups and attacking the enemy [Godlewski, Przybyszewski 1996].

Cavalry was an important part of the army at that time as well. Individual and group rivalry of cavalry troops was popular at many “Sokół” events. This attractive element was presented at shows, events e.g. parade marches.

¹⁵ *Pracising with a lance is not only original, not only characterises our nation who carried a ceaseless fight for homeland, who did not know any other fighting than that one on a horse with a lance, but is also truly beautiful (...) let it tell us about our past which was beautiful, heroic and full of sacrifice*. PG 1901, p. 176 and 177.

¹⁶ *The project of the programme for holding Slav competitions in 1909*. PGS 1909, chapter XXIX, p. 12.

¹⁷ The belts for wrestling consisted of: a rope of an average thickness, several metres long, cut into two equal halves, fixed to two webbing belts of ¾ metres long and 4–5 centimetres wide. PGS 1897, chapter XVII, p. 103.

¹⁸ It was made of a perch (a stem) 2–2.5 metres long and two handles curved toward the stem in bows. Facing an opponent, one could wrestle with arms and legs. Standing back to each other, both practising members could exercise nape, back, trunk and leg muscles. PG 1899, p. 12, PGS 1891, chapter X, p. 19.

¹⁹ The rods used in wrestling were made of oak wood, their diameter is 2.5 metres and length is 0.5 metre.

²⁰ Such structures existed, among others, in Nisko (Ścisła Drużyna Sokola), in Lvov – “Sokół II” (Stała Drużyna Wzorowa) in Przemyśl (Stała Drużyna Liniowa).

Fast moving of units at long distances was also useful. Therefore, there was a competition of a 20-kilometre march on time (of groups and units as well) in a military organisation.

Just before the outbreak of the First World War, some of the gymnastic competitions became more utilitarian e.g. a long jump with a rifle in a complete uniform or throwing a grenade that replaced the preceding throws with a javelin, discus, stone, shot or a solid ball [“Przewodnik Gimnastyczny «Sokół»”].

At the beginning of the second decade of the 20th century gymnastic rivalry of women became also popular. The main aim of promoting “Sokół” gymnastics among women was training discipline and preparing to serve as military assisting personnel [Bach 1939].

The military character of “Sokół” exercises before the outbreak of the First World War reflected the international atmosphere prevailing at that time. Let us remind ourselves that it was the time when the states of the trilateral agreement and the trilateral alliance and their supporters rapidly increased the size of their armies what heralded a military conflict soon. It created a real possibility of regaining independence by the Polish nation. In such a case the most useful were military and utilitarian abilities what was reflected in the evolution of the “Sokół” programmes.

IV

As far as technology is concerned (hopology is a science on arms and protective weapon), it needs to be stated that “Sokół” had several attributes characteristic of military structures. The first one was the uniform which distinguished the “Sokół” members out of the rest of the society because of its military features. In 1884 a special Commission was appointed whose task was to prepare the pattern of the “Sokół” uniform: a Batory’s cap²¹, a Kościuszko’s czamara (a long-sleeved, fitted, braided outer garment, fastened at the neck)²², harem pants²³, a shirt²⁴, a belt²⁵, shoes²⁶ and gloves²⁷.

The set of arms used in “Sokół” exercises evolved in two directions. First, like the “Sokół” uniform, it was related to the rich and glorious military traditions of the Polish nation (thus, the presence of a scythe, a lance, a Batory’s cap etc.). Second, the falcons realised of the fact of technological progress occurring in the armies at that time²⁸ and therefore, they introduced more effective and modern forms of arms.; e.g. in common free exercises, cold steel and shaft weapon were replaced by “Werndel”²⁹ guns in 1910. Throwing a grenade replaced throwing e.g. a javelin, a shot. Gymnastic and athlete exercises were replaced by exterior and utilitarian exercises performed in military gear.

²¹ Batory’s cap, the outer edge was round, tilted up and backwards, made of black, soft hat felt or baize, 8–10 centimetres high. The inside had the same height, finished with a baize crown of czamara colour. On the outer edge, above the left eye, there was a falcon’s feather, 15 centimetres long attached obliquely with an amaranth bow decorated with a silver falcon with widespread wings.

²² Czamara, outer rope with long sleeves, a turn-down or shawl collar, worn during the January uprising. Kościuszko’s czamara made of light baize, long up to the sleeves, standing, turn-down, embroidered collar. The front of czamara was decorated on both sides with six double and silk stripes 10 centimetres long each. The back had three pleats fastened with a button on each side. Double shoulder straps made of epaulette 5–6 millimetres thick, sewed by the sleeves and fastened with a button by the collar; an epaulette 1 centimetre thick put in an individual manner under both or one shoulder strap; at the end of the epaulette a loop and a ball for fastening.

²³ Harem pants, long, baggy trousers, gathered in waist and ankles. Baize harem pants, the same colour as czamara, of uhlan pattern, tucked into shoes.

²⁴ Amaranth shirt, smooth, silk or woolen (or percale) with one fold in the front, white collar and white cuffs.

²⁵ Black belt, leather, 5 centimetres wide, fastened with silver clamp with a typical decoration.

²⁶ Light black shoes, with legs gathered at the bottom, of the Polish pattern.

²⁷ Salmon-pink light gloves, washable.

²⁸ (...) *A hatchet is not an effective weapon any more with respect to a browning and a rifle.* PGS 1909, chapter XXIX, p. 56. Throwing a hatchet at a defined target appeared within the Polish Sokół during the Association’s competitions in 1910. PGS 1910, chapter XXX, p. 71.

²⁹ *Werndel rifle was used in practising (It was 129 centimetres long).* “Ćwiczenia karabinem”, Ruciński, Sz., PGS 1910, chapter XXX, p. 11.

Conclusion

Preparing young Poles to fight for their country was of one of the main aims of "Sokół", set up in 1867. Therefore, it is not a surprise that military and utilitarian exercises and martial arts constituted c.a. ¼ of the total number of different forms of activity. Taking into account the organisational range of "Sokół" (over 30 thousand members, 283 nests just before the outbreak of the First World War)³⁰, it needs to be stated that the Association significantly influenced promoting martial arts and defensive competitions on the Polish territory. The evolution of some sports disciplines on the Polish territory since 1914, (e.g. fencing, wrestling) was connected with the activity of "Sokół".

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Słowa kluczowe: historia, sport, sztuki walki, uzbrojenie, „Sokół”

STRESZCZENIE

Towarzystwo Gimnastyczne „Sokół” często określa się mianem „kolebki” współczesnego sportu. Szereg dyscyplin sportowych doszukuje się w Towarzystwie swoich pierwowzorów, a historia ich rozwoju na ziemiach polskich niejednokrotnie związana jest bezpośrednio z działalnością „Sokoła”. W bogactwie form aktywności fizycznej Towarzystwa szczególną rolę zajmują sporty walki oraz ćwiczenia o charakterze obronnym, wojskowym i utylitarnym. Niniejsza publikacja ma na celu wykazać jak ewoluował program Towarzystwa – w aspekcie sportów walki – w latach 1867–1914. Opracowanie składa się z czterech części. Pierwsza, przybliży genezę powstania Towarzystwa Gimnastycznego „Sokół” na ziemiach polskich, druga przedstawia analizę „systemu sokolego” ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem sportów walki. W trzeciej części zamieszczono informacje dotyczące ćwiczeń o charakterze wojskowym i utylitarnym w programie Towarzystwa. Ostatnia część opisuje aspekt technologiczny w kontekście ewolucji oręża i uzbrojenia sokolstwa polskiego.

³⁰ PGS 1929, chapter XLVI, no. 4, p. 68; Z. Bill, J. Rybiński *100 lat...*, p. 14; J. Snopko, *Polskie...*, *op. cit.*, p. 99–101, here the number of members is 29 154 and the number of nests is 261.