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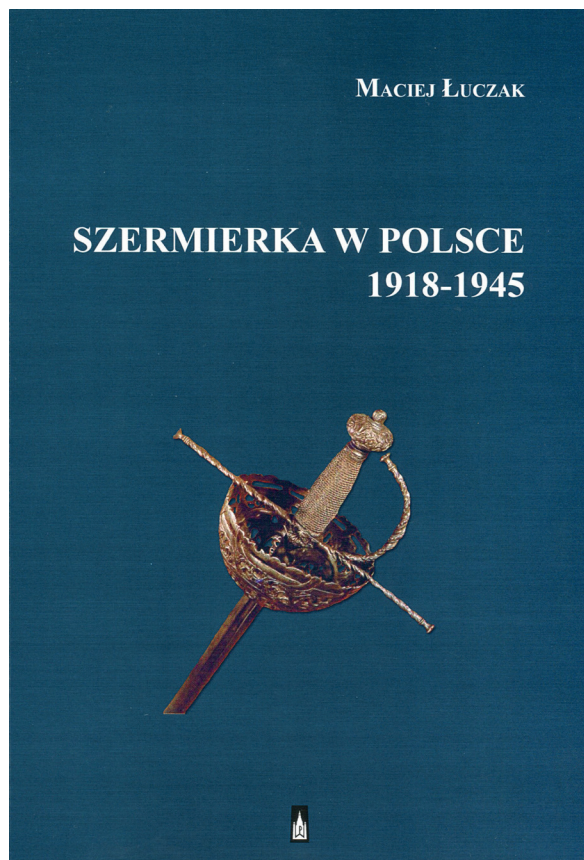
Fencing in Poland – 1918–1945

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Abstract

This is a review of the book by Prof. Maciej Luczak entitled *Fencing in Poland – 1918-1945 (Szermierka w Polsce w latach 1918-1945)*, Wydawnictwo Poznańskie sp. z o.o., Poznan 2016, 228 pp. [in Polish].



The book provided to me for review – *Szermierka w Polsce latach 1918-1945* – is a publication which has been highly anticipated by historians of physical culture and sport and by a circle of all kinds of fencing aficionados. By this I mean fencing trainers, contestants, experts on military accessories and melee weapons, researchers into the transformation of practical fencing for duels into

sport forms, and supporters of historic and sport fencing. This book fills the gap perfectly and I firmly believe that it will be appreciated by many readers, while inspiring them to delve deeply into the history of melee weapons in the interwar period and in World War II. The idea of the author to focus his research on the development of fencing between 1918 and 1945 seems very appropriate, as this period saw a revival in sport fencing in general and is associated with the first tremendous international successes of Polish fencers, which were started by the bronze medals of swordsmen at the 1928 Olympic Games in Amsterdam and of Los Angeles in 1932. The canon of Polish Olympic heroes of the inter-war years includes such great fencers as Adam Pappé, Kazimierz Laskowski, Leszek Suski, Tadeusz Friedrich and Leszek Lubicz-Nycz. These achievements were repeated at the European Championships of Liege, Belgium in 1930. The spontaneous development of sport fencing was accompanied by organisational measures being taken which included the foundation the Polish Fencing Association in 1922 and the organisation of European Championships in Warsaw Agricola in 1934.

A broad discussion of the tough and heroic attitudes of Polish fencers during the War and the German occupation from 1939 and 1945 is a perfect centrepiece to the book. The complicated stories and patriotic attitude of our fencers, many of whom died fighting the invader, and in concentration camps in Katyn and Starobielsk, is valuable historical research and probably a first by a Polish researcher and is a great result of his detailed access to Second World War historical sources.

As part of the reviewer's duties I have to mention that the book is a large volume monograph with 228 pages.

The author has divided the publication into six chapters that contain 21 sections justified by the substantial content and internal logic of the issues he presents. The bibliography is very impressive, containing hundreds of references, including many never previously published. This is also true for the figures and photographs, many of which are very well-known to experienced readers of historic and fencing books, but a substantial number of them are unique and probably presented in print for the first time. A precious gem among them is a photograph of General Bolesław Wieniawa-Długoszowski, the then President of the Polish Fencing Association in 1938, with prominent Polish fencers of the interwar years (p. 63). This is especially noteworthy and is evidence of the author's exceptional activity in searching for new literary sources. Numerous annexes perfectly round-off the factual matter mainly by presenting the results of key fencing events and competitions in the inter-war period in Poland.

Special attention should be paid to the first chapter entitled "Origins and development of fencing before 1918" which forms a substantial part of the book and which serves as a peculiar introduction. A number of topics in order of their historical context guide the reader from Old Polish sabre fighting through the complexities of duel fencing up to the turn of the twentieth century sport fencing was introduced to the programme of the Athens Olympic Games in 1896. It should be noted that fencing as a sports discipline has never since left the Olympic Games programme. An important element, highlighted by the author, is the fact that at that time, fencing as a sport, was organised and based in academic, military and police clubs. The training programmes used in the army and police at that time included the use of bayonets, and fencing was seen as a basic combat skill for soldiers and policemen. Despite the fact that firearms were replacing melee weapons on the battlefield, as we know, the Polish cavalry were still using lances and swords in military actions during the September Campaign of 1939.

Chapters two to five are a logical continuation of the key assumptions of the book. Following them, the author presents his views on: "Conditions for the development of fencing in Poland 1918-1939". He then focuses on the spread of fencing in the school programme at cadet schools and public education institutions, especially at the universities and the two higher physical education schools in Poznań and Warsaw. He writes in some detail about the characteristics of the organisational structures after the foundation of the Polish Fencing Association in Lviv in 1922. He puts emphasis on the importance of the development of fencing circles all over Poland, from Vilnius to Poznań and the founding of new fencing clubs. The author describes and analyses the changes that occurred at that time in both the technique and tactics of fencing bouts in an interesting manner and

chronicals the formation of fencing schools based on Italian and Hungarian models. He also highlights the first attempts at creating a system for training fencing teams, starting with the trainers, then the swordsmen. At the end he presents accurate statistics of the results of regional, national and international competitions. He also offers a perspective on the question of contestants' preparations for competitions in Poland and abroad. He emphasises the origins of the introduction of modern training methods, including the first fitness preparation camps and the special (fencing) preparation camps that took place at the Central Institute for Physical Education in Warsaw. The author also presents profiles of the original fencers: Szombateli, Pieczyński, Kozy-Kozarski, Szempliński and others. He focuses on their great impact on the formation of the foundations of the Polish fencing school, especially in relation to the sabre as the national weapon.

The work under review definitely aspires to be labelled a scientific monograph and will definitely become an invaluable source for future research inquiries, including its use in numerous scientific publications, PhD or habilitation theses. The clear narration style together with detailed descriptions and large numbers of previously-unknown facts also makes it very accessible for the less sophisticated reader. Some parts of the text given their originality, can interest and absorb the reader every bit as well as a work of fiction. In other words, one can say that this monograph is also valuable as a popular science publication.

The book as a whole astonishes with its diversity and the abundance of the content it presents. One can clearly see that the author's writing skills were not overpowered by the large amount of material he encountered. His academic maturity and previous literary experience mean that the individual plots, chapters and sections have been presented both consistently and proportionately.

I am fully convinced of my recommendation of the book *Szermierka w Polsce w latach 1918–1945* by Maciej Łuczak to the readers of "Ido Movement for Culture. Journal of Martial Arts Anthropology".

Szermierka w Polsce w latach 1918–1945

Słowa kluczowe: historia, sport, szermierka

Abstrakt

Jest to recenzja książki prof. Macieja Łuczaka zatytułowanej *Szermierka w Polsce w latach 1918–1945*, wydanej przez Wydawnictwo Poznańskie sp. z o.o., Poznań 2016 (228 stron). Autor książki specjalizuje się w historii kultury fizycznej, a jednocześnie – w tematyce szermierczej. Autor recenzji wysoko ocenia tę monografię i poleca osobom zainteresowanym historią szermierki sportowej.