DE GRUYTER OPEN

DOI 10.1515/apd-2015-0019

Organization and Regulation of Fencing in the Realm of France in the Renaissance

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Abstract – During the nineteenth century, many sources were published about the regulation of fencing in Renaissance France. Comparing those sources shows significant though incomplete uniformity in the formalities observed in the training of students of fencing, particularly in the process followed by the neophyte in his passage to mastery of the art of defence.

Keywords – fencing, regulation, France, Renaissance

I. INTRODUCTION

The teaching of fencing in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in France is a subject rarely addressed by most historical studies. It was often approached indirectly, as in the monographs of Sydney Anglo (late 1980s through the 1990s, summarized in his book in 2000) which highlighted the study of fencing manuals, through the history of fencing (Drévillon 2002), or through a catalogue of historical sources without any direct connection (Letainturier-Fradin 1904). This article aims to present an overview of the practice of fencing in the kingdom of France, using as its principal sources the ordinances of weapons games which were published separately during the nineteenth century but never studied jointly. Limiting the study to the spatial territory of the kingdom of France provides a basis for the examination of a coherent if not always consistent area of law. Some comparisons are provided with other European regions.

II. VOCABULARY PECULIAR TO THE TEACHING OF FENCING

In the time and region under consideration, the custom was to refer to the study of arms in terms of a '*game*' rather than as '*fencing*'. This was further specified by the set of weapons, as in sword play ('*jeu de l'espée*'), axe play ('*jeu de la hache*')*,* and so one. This term of game ('*jeu*') does not derivate from the Latin '*ludus*' but received all his meanings (Bloch, Wartburg 2004:318) and these two words was commonly used to translate one into another since the medieval times; it referred not just to the practice of such weapons in combat, but also to learning and by extension therefore to the entire art of fencing with such weapons. This use seems to have been common for a significant part of medieval Europe. The word '*ludus*' was used in the manuscript I.33 from the Royal Armouries, the oldest known Western European fencing book. Dating from the early fourteenth century, the text originated from within the Holy Roman Empire and was written primarily in Latin. In folio 7r, '*ludus'* is used as follows: "*Hic erit ludus prioris custodie*" (here one will have a play from the previous guard, Cinato & Surprenant:56).

This usage does not seem to have passed into the common language as later German fencing manuals preferred the term '*Kunst*' (Art). Nevertheless, '*play*' could still be used as a generic term to refer to the practice of fencing, as for example in Strasburg in 1555 when a Magistrate wanted to know who was the fencing master that taught some young noblemen[1]. In England, the Masters of Defence were "*playing with the two hande sworde*" in the sixteenth century (Brown 1997:26-27). In Italy this vocabulary was also in use, as in Milan in 1474 when a fencing master challenged another master at the game of fencing[2].

Following this use, the term was derived in all its forms in the French sources: to play ('*jouer*') meant to practice, the fencer was called a player ('*joueur*') and the teacher or the expert in the art a game-master ('*maître joueur*') or in Latin '*magister in ludis*'. For example, in a certificate of a fencing master from 1489 from Rocles, in Provence, the jury was composed by two masters and experts at playing with the two handed sword, with the short sword & shield or buckler, and also with the staff:

> *"magistris et expertis in ludis magne spate duarum manuum et parve spate cum clipeo sive bloquerio, ac etiam in ludis baculi*
>
> (Cocheris 1866:180)"

This Latin form '*magistris in ludis*' (master in the game) matches curiously to '*ludi magister*' which means school master; it is probable that this similarity could be explained in that, in Western Europe, a location where a game took place was commonly called '*a school*'. Another hypothesis was provided by Jean-Michel Mehl who argued that in Greek '*scholè*' meant '*leisure*' or '*rest*', and this meaning was retained partially in the Latin '*schola*' (1996:377-378). As further examples, Mehl noted some mentions of dice schools in French or Flemish sources from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In the Holy Roman Empire the term fencing school, '*Fechtschul*', used from the end of the fifteenth century fit exactly in this definition of a location and time where the activity took place, often in public and usually outside of a context of teaching. This can be traced to the fourteenth century in France, as in this remission letter from 1377 where a man had gone to play at the buckler play with the school master from the town[3].

These parallels continue further; the student was called '*escollier*' (Millin 1818: 291, Bayle 1890:338) which term closely resembles the '*scholler*' in sixteenth century sources from England (Brown 1997:26-27) or even '*scolaris*' in manuscript I.33 (Cinato & Suprenant 2009:40).

In the sixteenth century two words were used synonymously in French texts: '*escrime*' and '*palestrine*'. The first had long been in use, especially in chivalric novels, but was not

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1 *"Mittler weil erkhündigen vnd erfaren wie es zům nechsten zůgangen item erfaren welcher fechtmeister mit den jůngen Edlen spil."* Archives of the city and urban community of Strasburg, 1R18 folio 176v.

2 *"li dicti Magistri e deffidarli a zoghare siccho de scrima"* (Anonymous 1885).

3 *"pour aler jouer au jeu du bocler avec le maistre de l'escolle de ladite ville"* (Broussillon 1905:469)

used frequently in technical contexts such as certificates or legal documents. The second one seems to be a neologism built upon the base of the Greek word '*palestra*', meaning the place where young boys had physical training such as wrestling, running, throwing, etc. Both words seemed to have been used in the context of fencing, interchangeably, and sometimes as if they referred to two different things as seen in the Latin extract from a trial in Nîmes, dated from 1518: "*magister artis palestrine sive de l'escrime*" (Puech 1891:214). My opinion is that was the two sides of the same coin, a sort rhetorical figure which encompass all the possible denomination for the activy of fencing. Another example later in the century can be found in the publication in 1563 of the investigation of the court of Toulouse concerning the famous affair of the return of Martin Guerre wherein a witness said that Martin was skilled in fencing: "*Martin jouoit bien de l'escrime, & palestrine*" (Coras 1561:43).

These terms grew in popularity during the century and were more and more used, especially to avoid specifying a long list of weapons being played: "*master of the Palestrine game, also known as the five weapons*"[4].

The large and rich set of specific terms used in the context of fencing should be enough to attest that the practice of fencing was well established in the kingdom of France from the fourteenth century and not only for the upper class.

III. TEACHING OF FENCING

As we have already seen through the study of the vocabulary, fencing was taught by masters who were also called '*game-masters*'. But this raises the question, what was the context of learning? Normally, one would expect that this would be done in an environment called a school, but as seen before, the historical term of school in the context of game was a false friend and mostly referred to the location where the game took place. Drévillon (2002:87-108) mentioned five different locations for teaching fencing during the seventeenth century : outside in public, in a dedicated room rented or owned by the master, in private at the client's home, hired by an institution like the '*académies*', or hired by a nobleman. How does this compare with previous centuries? First, there were no institutions like the '*académies*', which were created in the seventeenth century. There were many brotherhoods of fencers in the French-speaking cities of Flanders close to the border: Tournai (Bozière 1864:228-229), Lille (Scrive-Bertin 1890:83-92) or Mons (Dévillier 1862:53-55), but in the realm of France there was nothing similar[5]. Although the existence of wage-earning fencing masters and lessons given in private seem to have been more often encountered in the seventeenth century (Drévillon 2002:87-108), there is evidence of their existence as early as the fifteenth century: Ambroise, axe player from Milan who taught at the court of Burgundy c.1438

4 "*maître du jeu de Palestrine, autrement appelé les cinq bâtons d'armes*" (Anonymous 1914:331).

5 Actually, Tournai was an French enclave inside the Flanders until 1521, and until this date, was probably the lone city having a brotherhood of fencers in the realm of France.

(Laborde 1849:356), and Charles de Sac from Mantua, "*maître joueur d'espée*" who served King Henri II (Martin 1893) before 1549. Both were Italian. This was not unique, as through the end of the sixteenth century and even afterwards, French nobility seem to have preferred Italian fencing masters (Brioist 2002:63-70).

There are probably other contexts of learning. People could certainly have learned fencing during their military experiences, but this subject is desperately short of evidence, at least for the studied period. Oddly, a small novel from 1596, perhaps an autobiography, mentioned the lessons received by a young thief on self-defense with a staff: lessons done inside his gang.

> *"They gave me a staff to see if I knew how to play with it, but I did not. They showed me faithfully and with much affection, teaching me the staff: how to do the 'faux montant', the rake, the 'aquige habin', the bracelet, the 'endosse', the 'courbier' and many other good tricks. My partner found me a past master, which he was delighted about."*
>
> (Pechon de Ruby 1999:14)

Finally, the archives hold some interesting documents such as certificates of fencing masters, which are a great source of information. Here follows the translation of one of these certificates, dated from 1499, and originating from Châteaudun, the transcription of which is detailed below in the appendix (§6.2.1).

> *"Jehan Gonnet, ordained, commissioned and delegated master at the plays of sword, half-pike and dagger, certified by authentic letters, came to us today to institute, establish and pass master in the said plays Jehan Phelipon, who after being tested, appeared skilled enough. He gave and gives him by this document all rights, authority and mandate to practice and teach these plays in public or (in private) wherever he wants in all the kingdom of France. And in doing so to hold schools and manage students in all places and cities of this kingdom and other places he would like to be. After that, I have received the usual oath obliging him and his students to follow and keep the rights, statutes and ordinances of the said plays."*

This certificate formally documents the legal right of a master teacher to hold schools, to organize public events, and to teach in public,in his own fencing room or in private.

Jehan Phelipon received the right to teach a subset of weapons plays throughout the kingdom of France. In the mostly decentralized France of that time, such rights could only be possible with royal permission. Unfortunately, to date, the archives of the kings of France have not yet provided a copy of any official edict or ordinance on the subject, making it difficult to determine when such rights might originally have been granted. At its end, the certificate reminds the recipient that such freedom has its price: "*to follow and keep the rights, statutes and ordinances of the said plays*".

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the teaching of fencing in France appears to have had a large variety of contexts, most paralleling the possibilities offered in the seventeenth century, with the notable exception of the lack of private institutions able

to hire a fencing master as a temporary employee. Fortunately, a handful of documents from the sixteenth century (published in the nineteenth century) provide slightly different versions derived from the above mentioned statutes and ordinances. They are a significant source of information about how fencing was taught and learned.

IV. ORDINANCE OF FENCING IN THE REALM OF FRANCE

1. Presentation of the existing ordinances

There are only five known documents from France in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that could be defined as ordinances of fencing. For convenience, a description of each has been put in the first appendix; their abbreviations follow:

- OM – ordinance of the staff from Mazan, 1501,
- OD – ordinance of Dijon, c. 1520,
- OA – ordinance of Amiens, 1530,
- OC – ordinance of the Châtelet of Paris, before 1547,
- OR – ordinance of Reims, 1576.

All these five documents are physically very different; one had been stored with a provost certificate (OM) from Mazan, three had been approved by the local authority of Amiens (OA), Paris (OC) and Dijon (OD) and the fifth had been affixed to a rigid support (OR). Two are completely rhymed (OA, OD) and two have rhymed prologues (OM, OR). The content of four of them has nothing dealing with the regulation of the profession; only one introduces some articles dealing with that subject (OA:§22-23, §31-33). However, they all share similar content about how to manage a school or conduct teaching sessions.

As mentioned previously, the certificate from Châteaudun referred to an existing ordinance of fencing in 1499. This was not the only one, the oldest reference to such an ordinance having been found in a certificate from 1455[6]. Sixteenth century references include La Rochelle in 1531 (de Richemond 1885) and Abbeville in 1571:

> *"Vallery Duquesmont his old master made Cossart swear the accustomed oath to be subject to the statutes, royal ordinances, and fencing ordinances without being able to contravene to them"*[7]

This sentence has many similarities with the one from Châteaudun, although separated by seventy two years. Ordinances also referred to these certificates, at least in the versions from Amiens and Châtelet that remind the candidate that it was forbidden to

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6 *"ledit prévost a promis qu'il tiendra, gardera et observera à son povoir les ordonnances faites sur lesdiz jeux"*, [Du Cange], entry Magister Ensiludii.

7 *"Vallery Duquesmont ancien maitre a fait preter le serment en cas requis aud. Cossart qui s'est soumis aux statuts, ordonnances royales, ordonnances du jeu d'armes sans jamais pouvoir y contrevenir."* (Anonymous 1918:259).

show or teach fencing without having a letter granting him the statute of master (OA:§2.10, OC:§2-v.355-356).

Given the commonalities of form and language, there is little doubt that all five of these documents draw from a family of regulations whose nature was shared from master to master and civil authority to civil authority within France during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Those differences between the known ordinances likely represent a small drift caused by the long span of time (1501 to 1576) and the large area covered by them. Many questions still remain. Looking at a map, these five documents are all located along a generally straight line from Amiens to Mazan, but it would be very dangerous to conclude anything about that geographical region from such a small number of examples.

It is probably better to look at what these ordinances shared. They all contained at least two parts, although sometimes they were intermixed. The first included procedures of initiation of a new student into a school from the initial oath to final examination; the second provided long lists of behaviors forbidden inside the school or during bouts and their associated fines.

2. Behaviour during teaching

This second part of the ordinances is probably the more curious for a modern reader. The content of each ordinance differs somewhat from the others, but they actually are very close. The following table shows the most common rules with a count of their instances among the five texts; for convenience more generic terms than those employed in the ordinances are used to clarify the topics.

2.1 Politeness

Rules	Instances
salute at the entrance of school to the master and fellows	5
blasphemy forbidden (including speaking in vain the name of the Lord, Virgin, Devil, Saint, …)	5
polite behavior (do not tease about women, no dirty stories, no burping, no farting)	4
no one may spit in his hands while he is fencing	3
no one may fence without decent clothes	3
no one may talk or make signs during a master's demonstration	3

All versions of the ordinances insist on the salute to the master and fellows at the entrance of a school, which seems to have been a standard of courtesy for fencing schools. This obligation was coupled to the banning of any form of blasphemy; this was almost certainly a minimal standard of decorum required by the local authority, civil or religious.

2.2 Respect to the weapons

Rules	Instances
no one should let one's weapon fall to the ground	5
no one should lift the sword with his foot, nor tread upon the same	4
salute at the entrance of school to the weapons	3
no one may touch the weapons or any equipment available in the school without permission	3

2.3 Safety

Rules	Instances
no one should pass between weapons or between the master and the equipment	4

One could expect to see most of these rules appearing in a more general ordinance. That they are common among these five records shows that they are fundamental and shared across the board. It is likely that these provide a set of minimal conditions to satisfy local authorities that fencing could be taught within their territories while maintaining civil order. An action that likely was held in common among the schools but not noted generally (OC:§2.-v340-345) was for opponents to touch hands before their play as a sign of good intent. This shares similarity with a remission letter from 1426 where both players were recorded as having touched hands before their bout during a public game, "*as usual for this game*"[8].

Finally it could be interesting to compare the different value for each fine; but the values were given using a mix of units of currency ('*blanc*', '*gros*') and units of account ('*denier*', '*sou*'). In the ordinance of the staff play from Mazan, the standard amount for the fine was ten '*deniers*', and one '*demi-gros*' for any rudeness. The ordinances from Dijon do not mention any value for the fines, all the amounts concerned only the wages due by the student. In the Amiens' ordinances the fines vary from eight '*deniers*' or one '*blanc*' (about ten '*deniers*') to forty '*sous*' - an immense sum - for teaching without a master or provost certificate. In the Châtelet ordinances the fines varied from six '*deniers*' to five '*sous*'. Finally in the ordinances from Reims the fines vary from six '*deniers*' to five '*sous*' but therein again the '*blanc*' was also used. This means that it is impossible to make a proper comparison without a clear study of the value of each currency in the local market at the time and location of each record.

3. Procedure of initiation

Anyone wanting to learn a specific matter must swear on cross weapons that he will follow the rules and ordinances of this game. The ordinance of the Châtelet was the only one which gives the content of the oath (v.85-139). In this version, the student had to declare not to use the art for any bad reason including robbery and rape, and to behave honorably for the church, king and fencing master. He also had to declare to

8 "*comme on a acoustumé de fere audit jeu*" (Cacheux 1907:376).

follow the lessons until the end of the initiation which was validated by a ceremony called "*to pass in defense*" which will be detailed later. The student had to pay a fee to begin the training, sometimes fixed to half the cost of instruction, (OM:§6.4) but mostly fixed to a certain amount (OA, OC, OR, OD). The oath obliged the new student to pay for the entire teaching session even if he wanted to stop or suspend the lessons (OA:§2.4, OC:§2-v148-149, OR:§4.7, OD:§3-v.75-79). This was supported by a trial in Langres from 1394 between a priest and his master of buckler play. The master wanted to receive the totality of his wage and the priest protested that he had only received three lessons before having stopped (Simonnet 1866). Finally, the priest accepted to pay the remainder.

This first teaching session seems to have been fixed to a specific period, one month (OM:§6.4, OC:§2-v140-145) or six weeks (OA:§2.5) but sometimes there is no mention of duration. In such cases, the student had to pay a weekly subscription (OR:§4.26, OD:§3-v.28-37). This duration seems very short for initial training, especially with our modern standards, but it gives rise to two thoughts. First, there are no clues to quantify the intensity of training in the sources. With two hours per day, for example, after four weeks the students could have reached an interesting level of skill. Second, this short time was compatible with a traveling teaching paradigm, with the master or student coming from one place to another, then having a short session of one or two months before traveling away. That was the model for many fencing masters in the Holy Roman Empire, such as the one who arrived in Rothenburg in 1444 and there first had a public fencing school, then asked one florin for anybody wanting to follow a monthly teaching (Schubert 1995:241). This pattern, however, has not yet been documented as having been the case within France.

Following this stage, an intermediate examination appears in some versions (OA:§2.18, OC:§2.v159-160, OD:§3-v.8-9) that is called "*passer en roue*" the meaning of which is not clear. Literally it means to pass in wheel, maybe a reference to Sainte-Catherine or some sort of special ceremony, but could also mean to pass in the street and mean a public demonstration or a procession. Or it could mean to be enrolled. In two sources (OC, OD) it was an occasion for the master to receive a part of his salary; the ordinance of the Châtelet was the only one to grant the possessor of this rank an advantage of a second '*venue*' in the prize fighting (OC:§2-v.229-230), this term was unclear and will be discussed later with the description of the prizes.

4. To pass in defense

All versions of the ordinances concur in that there is a final step at the end of this first session, called to pass in defense, "*passer en défense*". Regarding the importance of this examination in the existing ordinances, it was a central part of the experience of learning the art of fencing. It generally concluded with the last payment due by the student to the master. The ordinances of the Châtelet claimed that no one could win a prize or can even be called student of a specific set of weapons if he had not passed his defenses for

it (§2-v. 236239). This was supported by the ordinances from Dijon which told that one could not pretend to be a player, without having passed in defense (§3-v.22-23). This could be the best advantage granted to this rank: being able to play a prize and even better, being able to win it. In a time when people were really addicted to games of chance, giving them the possibility to play and win was an incentive that should not be underestimated. This ceremony was never described, but four of the ordinances clearly mentioned that the graduate must play the prize publicly after having passed his defenses within the school (OM:§6.18, OD:§3-v14-15, OA:§2-7, OC:§2-v.172-176). At first glance, one might think that this prize fighting was the test by itself, but the sources clearly indicate to the contrary; they were two separate stages. This was supported by the English sources, especially the manuscript Sloane 2530 from the British Library, where to become a free scholar one must demonstrate skills to a college of masters before the organization of the prize (Berry 1991, Brown 1997:39-40). The virtue of this prize as an initiation rite should be seriously taken into account. A private examination was one thing; a public demonstration was of much greater value.

Each ordinance obliged the candidates to favor their masters and their sponsors ('*parrain*') by giving them a pair of gloves (OM, OA, OC, OR) or a unique lined glove (OD) before being tested. This was the only mention of this sponsor, whose role in the training is not clear, but it could contribute to the reinforcement of the initiation rite already mentioned.

5. Prize and challenge

These versions of the ordinances only mention prize fighting in the context of the passage in defense. In the statutes of the fencing masters of Paris in 1567, there is also mentioned both a provost and master prize (Daressy 1888:26). Therefore it is difficult to determine whether this examination allowed the player only to take his place in a ranking system or if there were also prizes and challenges in other contexts; the sources referring to prize fighting at the sword or other weapons are never detailed enough to clarify that point.

The procedure of prize fighting for passing in defense is described only in the ordinances of the Châtelet, but therein it receives a long treatment in comparison to other rules (§2-v.185-205). In this rule, there are two roles defined, the defender, or the student who had just passed his defense, and the assailants. Anyone could be an assailant, provided that he had made his oath for this type of game, with the exception of the provosts or fencing masters who could only participate in a master or provost prize.

Anyone having passed in defense had three '*venues*', those passed in wheel, two '*venues*' and only one for beginners. The first who began the contest gained the opportunity of a fourth '*venue*' at the end of the game. The '*venue*' was a common term in the ordinances (OA:§2.19,OC:§2-v.223-229); it had enough success to have been employed in English in the late sixteenth century with very few modifications within the same context and

probably with the same meaning[9]. In German a similar term was used, '*gang*' or his diminutive '*genglein*' meaning a course or passage, in this context a unity of actions inside a bout[10]. It was undoubtedly a technical fencing term which referred to a coherent subset of actions inside a bout. Previously, the smallest unity inside a bout was the number of blows, mostly for armored combat (Raynaud 2002:520-521); this seems to have been discarded, probably no longer relevant. The '*venue*' certainly began when the fencers approached each other and probably ended as soon as there was a clear breakdown in the assault or an intervention by a hypothetical referee. Following the ordinances, a fencer could have one, two or three '*venues*' against the defender during the prize, depending on his rank.

Thrusting was strictly forbidden during the prize. This was probably for safety reasons, and anyone being disarmed during the bouts should not be hit treacherously, but instead should be rearmed. The valid hits were those which were given above the belt or from the elbow upward, that is to say the upper part of the arms, the chest and the head. When two hits were received simultaneously, only the hit given by the defender was valid. There were five prizes awarded at such events:

- A jewel for the highest hit,
- A pair of glove for the second highest hit,
- A set of aiguillettes (lace chapes) for the third highest hit,
- A hat for the most beautiful venue,
- And finally a bunch of flowers for the biggest mistake.

The defender could be one of the winners, and in such a case the custom obliged him to give his prize to his master. The version of the ordinances of Dijon were more restrictive and obliged the defender to give the first prize he would win in a subsequent prize playing after having passed in defense (OD:§3.v.24-25).

The version from Amiens has two specific articles which were missing in the four others: both are in the context of fighting. The first forbids anyone to take down the prize the candidate of a prize had previously hung up (OA:§2.8); the second is a fine for causing an opponent to bleed during a bout (OA:§2.14). These two rules may come from Flanders, as similar rules appear in the set of rules from the Saint-Michel Brotherhood of Lille (Scrive-Bertin 1890:102) from the end of the sixteenth century. This important French-speaking city from Spanish Flanders is only a hundred kilometers from Amiens. There were certainly a lot of exchanges between the fencers from the north of France and Flanders, but this is subject that requires further study.

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9 "*playing at sword and dagger with a master of fence three veneys for a dish of stew'd prunes.*" (Shakespear 1720:11).

10 "*Dorum mußen wir tun ein genglein / Und triff ich dich mit deinem stenglein" from a carnival farce "Wie drei in ein Hause entrunnen*" from the fifteenth or early seventeenth century (Von Keller 1853:855).

This form of prize fighting with a defender, (who had to provide the prize) having to fight against every assailant entered in the contest seems to have been the standard. The principle of a fencer defending his prize is confirmed by a poem from Grévin published in 1563 which mocked Ronsard by comparing him to a fencer in a prize fight:

> *"However in your verses, as a brave fencer / Who defending a prize showed his courage, / You take only the rebated sword, / To avoid to kill or being killed / You wear your gloves / Then extend your arms / You attack him by a thrust or a high cut / some feeble hits with an unsharpened sword"*[11]

6. Equipment

The ordinances make a distinction between the weapon and the complete gear which is called the harness, the same word as the one used for armor. However, in the context of these ordinances, this term seems to mean any weapon or equipment dedicated to the activity. For example in the Amiens' ordinances: "*if anybody passes between two swords or other harness*" (§2.11), or in the ordinances of the staff play: "i*f anybody passes between two weapons of the harness*" (§6,3). It was possible however that a padded jacket or semi-rigid breast-plate in leather was provided to the fencers, but there is nothing documented to prove this. The interdiction to bout bareheaded exists only in one version (OC:§2-v.331-332) and this could be interpreted as a rule promoting wearing decent clothes such as shoes and a doublet. The ordinances of Amiens mention the obligation to wear a belt after having passed in wheel, (OA:§2.18), but this is probably connected to the fact that in a bout, valid touches are those given above the belt (OC:§2-v.182-183).

How students obtained weapons for their training was somewhat variable. A student might have to buy his weapon from the master as soon as he began his training (OM:§6.9), or he might have to pay for it only when he passed in defense (OR:§4.11). A third option was to oblige him to make made his own sword for the prize fight which would follow his defense (OC:§2-v.172-174). In 1518, in Nîmes, a trial was recorded between a fencing master and his student. The master asked seven shillings for the remainder of his lessons and eight shillings for the value of a two handed sword he gave to the student. The student admitted that he had already paid half of the total amount, had trained for one month and had even had passed an examination with all the other students in a public place. The local court of justice delivered a sentence in favor of the fencing master (Puech 1891:214).

It seems that most of the time, however, the equipment was provided by the fencing master to the new student at his initiation, and this could explain why it was strictly forbidden to let swords fall on the ground, or for anyone walk on them. In the

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11 "*Cependant en tes vers, comme un brave escrimeur / Qui, defendant un prix se monstre de cœur, / Tu prends tant seulement l'espée rabattue, / Afin de ne tuer et que l'on ne te tue / Tu prends les gants aux mains ; puis estendant les bras, / Tu mesures ton homme ; et avançant le pas, / Tu luy tires, d'estoc ou d'une haute taille, Des coups mal asseurez d'un glaive qui ne taille.*" (Grévin 1563:8).

ordinances from Reims, the student had to cover the cost of any broken sword or buckler (OR:§4.23).

7. Set of weapons in the ordinances

There is little variety in the weapons referenced: sword and buckler, two handed sword, staff, dagger, half-pike, and sword alone being the most popular.

Buckler play: This play is the oldest named within the kingdom of France (from at least 1341[12]) and thereafter it is mentioned continuously throughout the Middle Ages in a handful of remission letters studied by Jean-Michel Mehl (1990:63-64). It is rare to find an explicit mention of teaching this play in the sources, but there are at least two known instances from the fourteenth century: 1377 in Bourg-le-Roi (Broussillon 1905:469) and 1394 in Langres (Simonnet 1866). The first name was buckler play, but later in the sixteenth century this took the name of sword and buckler play. This was likely due to it being practiced with weapons other than the sword (such as short sticks) during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. There was also some variation in its name, such as '*float play*' ("*jeu de la taloche*")[13]. Latin mentions of this game often include both shield and buckler ("*clipeo sive bloquerio*") and it is difficult to determine exactly which type of buckler or shield was employed from the fourteenth century to the end of the sixteenth century.

Two handed sword play: The first mention of this game appears early in the fifteenth century, in a remission letter from 1426. At that date, it seemed to have already been well developed: a cleric from Bayeux in Normandy killed a friend during a public game at the two handed sword. The source tells us that they touched their hands before fighting as a matter of proof that the players were not angry. Unfortunately, during the fight the cleric hit his friend at the right eye which caused his death during the night (Cacheux 1907:376-377). This game seems to have been very popular up to the end of the sixteenth century, as was confirmed by many references in the literature, as in Rabelais' novel Pantagruel, in which the giant learned to play with the two handed sword in Toulouse following the fashion of the students[14].

Staff and pikes: The French word dedicated for the first of these weapons was "*bâton à deux bouts*". The staff seemed to be quite popular as it was mentioned in most versions of the ordinances as well as in many other sources (Dupuis 2011:153-157). The pike, also called in the sources half-pike referred certainly to a weapon from 2 to 3 meters long, that is to say, a staff steel-tipped on only one end.

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12 "*et à jouer au jeu des diz et de bouclier*" (Planiol 1896:52).

13 "*comme ilz eussent prins jeu par esbatement à jouer au jeu du bloquir et de la taloche*", Remission letter from 1400, [Du Cange] entry *Bloquerius*.

14 "*de la sen vint a Thoulouse ou il apprint fort bien a danser et a iouer de lespee a deux mains comme est lusance des escolliers de ladicte université*" (Rabelais 1542:19).

Sword alone: The play with this weapon alone appears from the beginning of the sixteenth century in Europe (Dupuis 2012:92). In the second half of the sixteenth century, it was often practiced with a dagger, but the French ordinances studied so far do not mention this play.

Dagger: It was astonishing to find this weapon cited in these ordinances as otherwise there are not many mentions of such play in other sources. This made it difficult to determine whether the weapon called dagger or short dagger in these ordinances was a cut and thrust weapon or only dedicated to the thrust.

Other weapons: This category lists those weapons cited in only one version of the ordinances, which include wrestling, pistol, and the axe or halberd. It is unclear if these weapons are truly atypical, or if this is simply a function of the limited number of sources available. These findings could be confirmed or challenged if additional sources are discovered.

8. Virtues of fencers

Two versions of ordinances propose a set of virtues and qualities that follow the medieval form of animal allegories (OM:§6.19, OC:§2.v.270-275) e.g., the heart of a lion, the eye of a hawk, the feet of a greyhound. These two versions differ in the fourth virtue; the ordinances of the Châtelet include the hand of a griffin whereas the ordinances of the staff play from Mazan proposed a curious one, '*corage de feme'*, which literally could be translated as the courage of a woman. The meaning was unclear as '*corage*' in medieval French could also be translated as spirit, awareness or perseverance.

9. Mythological and Religious aspects

Three ordinances had in their introductions a romanticized history of fencing (OM:§4, OC:§2-v.20-61, OR:§2). They all differ, but all mixed biblical and mythological references as Saint-Michael, the Trinity but also Charlemagne or Alexander. All conclude with the resemblance between the sword and the Holy Cross. Anecdotally, the author of the ordinance of the staff was not able to pretend to find the image of the cross in the staff, but he took care to note that this weapon was also made of wood (OM:§4-v.20) and its steel tip recalled the nails that pierced the hands of Christ (OM:§4-v.40-45).

It is worth noticing the parallel between the three stages of initiation, oath, wheel and defense assorted to their respective number of '*venues*' -1, 2, 3- and the sermon of the three Comings of the Lord from Saint Bernard[15]; this was enforced by the fact that the word devoted to translate '*adventus'* in Renaissance French was '*venue*' (Chappuys 1598:312). The first coming was in the flesh and in weakness, this is the stage of the beginner. The second coming was in spirit and in power, often considered as a hidden

15 It was the sixth sermon of the Advent (Butler 1774:104), in Latin "*De triplici adventu et carnis resurrectione*" (Bernard de Clairvaux 1739:1650-1654).

stage in the Christian texts. For the student, this was the progressive stage of learning and assimilation of the art. The third coming was in glory and majesty, but also in judgment; this was the stage to pass in defense, the judgment, but also the time of glory when the fencer has to defend his prize. It was maybe also to this trinity of stages, and not only to the Holy Trinity which was referred in the curious first verses of the ordinance of the Châtelet:

> *"In honor of the Trinity / three persons in unity / want to treat following the ordinance"* [16]

10. Discussions on the origin and dating of the ordinances

What could the origin of these ordinances be? The number of similarities shared across such a broad territory over time argues strongly for a common origin. Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that the Provost of Paris would have recorded a version of them claiming royal provenance (Francois I, who reigned from 1515-1547) had these ordinances not actually come from the king. It is therefore probable that these ordinances (which share so much in common) derive from an earlier regulation produced by an earlier King of France, even if such a document has yet to be found in the vast recorded list of ordinances. If the original document was missing from the royal archives, it would be less probable that a second updated or replacement document would also have been deleted. Therefore a reasonable hypothesis is that there was only one version of the ordinance given by an earlier king, but then by whom, and when? The oldest mention of such ordinances was dated from 1455 which gives the *terminus post quem* until another document is found that would challenge this date. It is doubtful, however, that it would have been issued before 1369 as at this date, the King of France produced a famous ordinance in which he forbade a list of games and encouraged the French people to train at shooting with bow and crossbow (Secousse 1736:172). There is no mention of any form of fencing therein, which would be surprising if an existing regulation had already been produced by a previous king.

V. CONCLUSIONS

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, a roughly common set of rules and regulations of fencing was shared in a large part of the kingdom of France and some bordering territories such as the Comtat Venaissin. These offered a common framework upon which trust could be created among local or foreign fencing masters, their clients (students) and the local authorities; this allowed these martial arts to develop not only in large cities, but also in small towns, like Mazan, Rocles, and Bourg-le-Roy, which appear in the sources cited above.

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16 "*En l'honneur de la Trinité / Trois personnes en unité / Veult en l'ordonnance trayre*" (OC:§2-v.1-3)

These rules focused on two aspects. First, they were an attempt to prevent unacceptable behavior during lessons and bouts; likely to assuage the concerns of the local authorities, civil or religious. Second, they proposed a fixed format for the management of contracts between fencing masters and their clients. On one side the master had a set of customs to guarantee him his income, especially with the oath, which was taken quite seriously at that time. On the other side, the client or student had the guarantee that he would receive instruction within a fixed time for a fixed amount of money and that he would finish his training with a public examination.

It is striking how many similarities there are between these ordinances and the rules set for the Masters of Defence from London, who also had a system of ranking from free scholler to maister. The same is true of the Flanders brotherhoods of fencers, or at least for those from Lille which shared not only the same ranking system but also many similar rules to manage the school (Scrive-Bertin 1890:96-103). It is worth noticing however that in both these instances the French ordinances seems to be older. A more in-depth study and comparison of each system would be interesting.

In England there was a community of fencing masters attested since 1540 (Brown 1997:25-37), and in Flanders the fencers were structured in brotherhoods which had a leading role in the city militia. In France there was no such recognized community of fencing masters before the last third of the sixteenth century, with the notable exception of Amiens (whose ordinances fixed some specific rules dedicated to the working statutes). The following certificate from Bordeaux was not certified by a notary, but kept by the Magistrate of the city, who took the responsibility of validating the rank of fencing master:

> *"Item public fencing prize in the art of palestrine conducted in the house and the presence of the city magistrates and other notable people and who agreed that he had done enough and with honor and was able to be received as master in this city. And having heard the prosecutor of the city, we order that Jean Tarascon will join the fencing masters of this said city and will swear the oath and after he had sworn Jean Tarascon was received as a fencing master of this city following the Court's judgment of the twenty-third of February 1599 in Parliament."*

There was no further mention of ordinances nor was the fencing master granted the privilege to exercise his role throughout the kingdom, but only that he would join the local community of fencing masters. It seems that by this date in France, the growth of local communities of fencing masters tolled the bell t for these ordinances, but that is a subject for another article.

VI. APPENDIX

Transcriptions of original manuscripts are provided in the appendix with the following conventions:

- **scribal contractions are expanded and the supplied letters italicized**
- **{...}** letters lost through blot, or cropped page
- <xxx> = deleted text
- \xxx/ insertion of text, either in the margin or between the lines
- (xxx) letters supplied by the editor

1. The five ordinances of fencing

Here follow a short description of each of the five known ordinances for practicing fencing in France in the sixteenth century. They are sorted chronologically, and given a reference built by concatenation of '*O*' and their position in this list.

1.1 OM – Ordinance of the staff play from 1501

This ordinance was the oldest known and was the only one specialized to a single weapon: the staff. It begins with a rhymed prologue, followed by nineteen articles. It was written in Mazan, a small village of the Comtat Venaissin, a territory of the south-east of France which had been transferred from the German Emperor to the papacy in the thirteenth century. The ordinance was declared by two fencing masters to a new provost and was compiled by a notary in complement to his certificate. The fencing masters pretended that these ordinances had been made by the ancients, validated by the emperor, the king of France and all the lords of the council of the Comtat Venaissin.

Type	record of a notarial deed
Source	minutes from Jean Forge, notary of Mazan
Edition	Bayle 1890:336-343
Dating	16th of August 1501
Author	Jan du Pré, Bertrand Borion both master of the staff play
Structure	§1 – introduction of the provost certificate §2 – copy of the master certificate for Bertrand Borion, dated from 1479 §3 – certificate of provost for Glaude Tardy §4 – rhymed prologue of the ordinance of the staff play §5 – introduction to the ordinances §6.1 to §6.19 – articles of the ordinances §7 – conclusion
Weapons	staff

1.2 OD – Ordinance of fencing of Dijon

This is a rhyming ordinance stored by the city council of Dijon in their archives. It was anonymous and contained no dating element; the archivists from the nineteenth century estimated it c.1520. Garnier did not propose a more accurate dating in his publication of the transcription in 1873. Later in 1911 Fyot published an extract of it in an article about fencing in Dijon and placed this document at the end of the sixteenth century, but without any justification (Fyot 1911:102-103).

It claimed that this ordinance followed the customs of the realm of France in general and the cities of Paris, Lyon, Rouen and Dijon in particular.

Type	ordinance of fencing manuscript
Location	Municipal archives of Dijon F.19
Edition	Garnier 1873 Fyot 1911 for a partial new edition
Dating	c.1520
Author	anonymous
Structure	§1 – introduction §2 – This paragraph received some important modifications (see below), the final version was a description of the weapons used and the monthly price for lessons. §3 – rhyming ordinance of 79 verses
Weapons	two handed sword, sword and buckler, sword alone, short dagger, staff, pike and other weapons

§2 - final version, transcription by Garnier

> Tous ceulx qui vouldront aprendre lesd*its* jeux darmes co*mm*e lespée à deux mains, lespée au bouclier, sans bouclier, la \courte/ daggue, le bastons à \deux boutz, la picque et plusieurs aultres jeux que ledict maistre monstrera à tous gentils compaignons, en payant pour \aprendre à juer desdicts/ bastons, ung escu dor tous les moys, avec la part de la chambre, \de ce q*u'elle*/ couste le moys et ung espée et bouclier, ou le harnoys de quoy ch*a*cun desd*its* compaignon*s* vouldra aprendre à jouer/.

§2 – Original text, unpublished, the section between '<' and '>' was stricken in the manuscript

> Tous ceulx qui vouldront aprendre lesd*its* jeux darmes co*mm*e lespée à deux mains, lespée au bouclier, sans bouclier, la \courte/ daggue, le bastons à \deux boutz,/ <cy apres declarez feront serme*n*t sur les sainctes evangilles et sur la croys de lespee de maintenir et garder lesdites ordonnances le proff{.}t du maistre et lhonneur des compaignons>

1.3 OA – Ordinance of the fencing and fencing masters from Amiens, 1530

This document was a city regulation validated by the municipal magistrates following the proposition of four local fencing masters (Augustin 1853). In 1530, the city of Amiens was a prosperous city of Picardy, with approximately 24.000 inhabitants and partial political autonomy from the realm of France (Bayard 1999:205-206).

Type	city regulation validated by the municipal magistrates of the French city of Amiens
Source	Municipal archives of Amiens, AA 13, f°242v-244v
Edition	Augustin 1853
Dating	19th of August 1530
Author	municipal magistrates
Structure	§1 – introduction §2.1 to §2.33 – articles include the fencing ordinance as well as some professional regulation for the fencing masters (§2.22-23, §2.32-33) §3 – conclusion
Weapons	great sword, short sword, half-pike, dagger and other weapons

1.4 OC – Ordinance of the Châtelet of Paris

This document was a long poem attributed to a fencing master Nicole Prunet. His prologue asserted that it was the royal ordinance of the Châtelet of Paris, a regulation which imposed these rules on the city of Paris. His dating was uncertain, the only clue was in the introduction of his publication a mention that this ordinance had been given by the king François de Vallois (Millin 1818:287), that is to say François the First who was King of France from 1515 to 1547. It was the most complete ordinance among the five of this list.

Type	royal regulation text from the Châtelet in Paris
Location	extracted in 1789 from the archives of the Châtelet
Editions	Millin 1818 Letainturier-Fradin 1904:78-91
Dating	1515-1547
Author	Master Nicole Prunet
Structure	§1 – description of the content §2 – rhymed ordinance of 356 verses – v.1-19 introduction – v.20-61 romanticized history of the sword – v.62-284 rules for the oath, the ranking, prize fighting – v.285-356 fines punishing bad behaviors
Weapons	great and short swords, sword and buckler, sword alone, wrestling, pistol, staff

1.5 OR – Ordinances of the game of Palestrine from Reims

This is a shorter text, found on a placard and published by the curate of the archbishopric of Reims, but nothing in its context attaches it to a specific territory inside the realm of France. The dating, following the article of Querry, has been done on the base of the date appearing on the back of the placard but is debated by the author who estimates the text to be older. Unfortunately, if the original document has survived since the nineteenth century, its current location is unknown. It would have been interesting to challenge the dating, especially if the date was written in Arabic numerals, where the number 1 and 7 are sometimes difficult to distinguish. However, without any additional information, this dating has to be conserved.

Type	placard
Location	unknown
Edition	Querry 1855
Dating	1576
Author	anonymous
Structure	§1 – one short poem of 8 verses §2 – romanticized history of the art of Palestrine or also said fencing §3 – the fencing masters could find their job anywhere and teach anybody §4.1 to §4.29 – articles of the ordinances
Weapons	sword and sword and buckler

2. Master certificates

2.1 Certificate from Châteaudun, 1499

Type	Minutes
Source	Archives départementales d'Eure et Loir, E. 2805. Minutes from the notary Oudin Costé of Châteaudun, p.340.
Edition	Unedited
Dating	between the 26th and 29th September, 1499
Author	Oudin Costé

> Jehan gonnet maistre ordonné com*m*is et depputé des jeulx de lespee de la demye lance et de la dague co*mm*e par l*ect*res autenticques nous est apparu a le jourduy en n*ost*re p*rese*nce institue estably et passe maistre en fait et industrie desd*ictz* jeux jehan phelipon auquel ap*re*s ce q*ue*l la experim*en*té trouué estre souffis*an*t et ydoine a ce co*mm*e il disoit. A donné et donne p*ar* ces p*rese*ntes plaine puissan*ce* aut*ori*te et mandeme*n*t expres de fe*re* et exe*r*cer lesd*ictz* jeux publiqueme*n*t ou aul*tre*me*n*t ou bon luy semblera ou et p*ar*tout le Royaulme de france. Et en ce fais*an*t tenir escolles escolliers p*ar* toutes alez et bonnes villes de ce Royaulme et aut*re*s lieux q*uil* veroit bon estre. Ap*re*s ce q*ue*l dud*ict* pha{...} ced*ict* maist*re* as{.}s et Receu deva*n*t nous le se*rmen*t en tel cas acoustume qui est de b*ien* et loyalme*n*t p*ar* luy et sesd*ictz* escoliers observer et garder les droiz statuz et ordonnan*ces* desd*ictz* jeux sur cef{...} Ainsi q*ue* en tel cas app*ar*tie*n*t bie*n*.

2.2 Certificate from Bordeaux 1599

Type	Magistrate decision
Source	City archives from Bordeaux, BB 20 23 02
Edition	Unedited
Dating	23th of February 1599
Author	Magistrate from Bordeaux

Item jeu de pris peublicq en {...} de palestrine en la mayson {...}

messieuz les juratz et aultres p*er*sonnages notables et lequel {...}

suffisamant \faict/ et auec honneur et lequel est capable pour estre receu {...}

en la p*re*sante ville Et ouy le p*ro*cureur de la ville. A este ordonne que Jehan Tarascon {...}

des mettres escrimeurs et palestrineur de la p*re*sante ville et fera le serema*n*t {...}

et jur{...} led*ict* Tarascon a esté receu m*ettre* pa[le]strineurz et escrimeur de la p*re*sente ville

suiuant larrest de la court du vingtroysiesme feburier mil cinq cens quatre vingt

dix neuf en parlema*n*t en laudiance de la grand chambre

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