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Reviewed by Ingo Petri, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut (Berlin), ingopetri@gmx.de

Volume 19, issue 2 of the journal “Das Mittelalter. Perspektiven mediävistischer Forschung. Zeitschrift des Mediävistenverbandes” unites under its key topic “Duellists. Fencing masters - champions – Samurai” six articles from the fields of historical science, German philological medieval studies, Scandinavian studies, codicology and Japanese Studies. It is partly the outcome of the conference “Akteure des mittelalterlichen Zweikampfs zwischen Marginalisierung und Professionalisierung” [Actors of medieval duel between marginalisation and professionalization] in January 2012 in Dresden. All Articles are provided with an English summary, otherwise the book is, with the exception of Michael Wert’s English article, written in German.

The editors Christian Jaser and Uwe Israel provide an introduction to the topic and put the contributions of the book into this context (pp. 241-248). This is followed by a bibliography of selected publications on the topic (pp. 249-252). The major comprehensive publications of the last 130 years are presented while abstaining from publications of single sources.

In his article “Die Aufzeichnung des Nicht-Sagbaren. Annäherung an die kommunikative Funktion der Bilder in den Fechtbüchern des Hans Talhofer” [Recording the non-speakable. Approach to the communicative function of the pictures in the fighting books of Hans Talhofer] (pp. 253-301) Eric Burkart discusses the communication strategies of medieval fighting books and the purpose of integrated images. In a case study on the five 15th century manuscripts ascribed to Hans Talhofer the didactic use of images is examined, stating that images in Talhofer’s manuscripts fulfil the function of interpretative Glosses in other teachings in the tradition of Liechtenauer. Further he analyses what purpose the pictorial representations of the fencing master and his pupils serve and how their identification is made possible, being very critical about the representations of Talhofer, as identified in the research literature up to now and showing that the depictions in the manuscript Hs. XIX, 17-3 from Königseggwald are not the subsequent recording of a real judicial duel but an ideal image of “true fencing” after Talhofer’s teaching. Matthias Johannes Bauer’s article, “*Einen Zedel fechter ich mich ruem/ Im*

Schwert und Messer ungestuem. Fechtmeister als Protagonisten und als (fach-)literarisches Motiv in den deutschsprachigen Fechtlehren des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit” [*A Zedel fencer I boast to be/ In sword and knife impetuous.* Fencing masters as protagonists and as a (specialist) literary motif in the German-language fencing teachings of the Middle Ages and the early modern period] (pp. 302-325) investigates the group of fencing masters of the 14th to 16th century. He mainly addresses four questions: What terms are used to describe or distinguish between fencers in Early New High German sources? Is it possible to form groups or represent role models? To what extent are the fencers presented as contemporary or real figures and to what extent are they just a (specialist) literary motif, for example for certification or as evidence for authority? Could these literary motives be used for allegories of fencers? He mainly focuses on Talhofer and Kal, the former being only temporarily entrusted, the latter serving a long time at courts as “Schirmmeister” (stable master) and not as “Schirmmeister” (fencing master) as usually assumed. He concludes that fencing masters are fighting for reputation and are from a German philological point of view mainly a (specialist) literary motif respectively a topos.

Daniel Gehrt, “Turnier-, Fecht- und Ringbücher in den Bibliotheken der Ernestiner” [Tournament-, fencing- and wrestling books in the libraries of the Ernestinians] (p. 326-349) deals with the complicated ways of tradition of the tournament-, fencing- and wrestling treatises from the libraries of the Ernestinian dukes of Saxony. His main questions are which functional and symbolic meaning can be attributed to them, if they served as a practical guide in learning the knightly arts or if they had predominantly a representative function in the princely libraries and what motives were behind the documentation of own tournaments and the collecting of old fencing- and wrestling books. He shows that the books were acquired partly for the education of the princes but mostly served the representation of the dynasty and the memory of agonal achievements. At the end he gives a table of the handwritten tournament-, fencing- and wrestling books that were in the library in Gotha or that still are.

Sixt Wetzler analyses the different roles of the duellists in the Icelandic saga literature. In his article “Ehre, Schwert und das Recht. Zweikämpfe im alten Island” [Honor, sword and the law. Duels in Old Iceland] (pp. 350-379) he focuses on *hólmganga* and *glíma*, the specific Old Icelandic forms of duelling. He analyses the role of the personnel of the duel and of duelling as an access to social prestige. A secondary question is how seemingly non-ritualised forms of violence can be understood from the perspective of the duel’s underlying ideological principles. Wetzler concludes, that *hólmganga* and *glíma* had many differences but that they had in common that they offered a way to improve, to back up or to restore the social position. Their performance was integrated into the public life and was subject to the control of the community, they controlled and situated violence in everyday life. Even unregulated fights were influenced by thought patterns and behaviours that the ritualised duels were based on.

In his article “*Infamis etiam campio non esse potest.* Kämpfen in deutschen und italienischen Städten des Spätmittelalters zwischen Marginalität und Rechtspflege” [Champions in

German and Italian cities of the late Middle Ages between marginality and judicature] (pp. 380-406) Christian Jaser develops a new perspective on the role of medieval paid fighters (Lohnkämpfer). Opposite to their general stated lack of rights on the basis of account books and statutes of late medieval German and Italian cities he shows a change of their role towards a professional protagonist of legislation. He concludes that in German cities, the image of the travelling lawless champions is relativised by a fixed employment with stable monthly salary, in Italy the champion business appears as institutionalised with remuneration according to fixed tariffs, with regulated occupation of the duel and set requirements for the fighters. In the Italian duel literature of the late Middle Ages the champions are even redefined to lawyers. However, the champion was always in suspicion not to fight with full dedication for financial reasons or for self-protection.

Michael Wert traces the origins of the Japanese art of fencing at the transition from the medieval to the early modern period with special focus of the meaning of the “Military Mirror of Kai” for the self-image of the samurai and the development of different fencing styles. In the article ““The Military Mirror of Kai”: Swordsmanship and a Medieval Text in Early Modern Japan” (pp. 407-419) he shows that swordsmanship emerged as a new field of knowledge in early modern Japan in a time of relative peace while during the violent periods of Japanese history the sword was not the primary weapon of the samurai. The focus is on the “Military Mirror of Kai” a mix of fact and fiction and was widely read by samurai of the early modern period, becoming a foundational text for early modern warriors. The “Military Mirror” was the oldest widely available text in the early modern period that described famous swordsmen and their styles. The anecdotes about them are brief, but they influenced the many origin stories retold by many swordsmen who trace their history into the mythical medieval past.

The volume concludes with twenty reviews of current publications from different fields of Medieval Studies, which, however, are not related to the topic of the volume discussed (pp. 420-452).

In their introduction to the volume, the editors state that the articles approach the phenomenon “duellists” in an interdisciplinary dialogue (p. 247). This is probably due to an attempt to present the volume in a better light, as well as the declaration the issue would illuminate the topic from a protagonist-centred perspective (p. 243). Strictly speaking, only Wetzler and Jaser really write about duellists. Bauer and Wert write about fencing masters and Burkart and Gehrt about the function of written sources. At least the latter would be hard to do in a protagonist-centred perspective. However, “duellists” suits as a more general umbrella term, since the written sources are mainly about duels and since fencing masters teach mainly duelling. Also, the interdisciplinary dialogue could be questioned. Only Burkart uses insights of another article of the present volume in his contribution (p. 256, note 7), but obviously without knowing the article completely. Other texts differ from one another (for example the differing information about the manuscript Leeds, Royal Armouries, MS. I.33 in the introduction and the articles of Burkart, Bauer, Gehrt and Wetzler or the information about the office of Paulus Kal in the articles of

Burkart and Bauer). The present volume is therefore better described as a multi-disciplinary anthology.

But these issues do not diminish the good overall impression of the volume at all. It only is a pity that for some Italian and Latin quotations, no translation is given.

Actually, the Volume is not at all in need to be presented in a better light because the contributions contain enough scientific potential on their own. All articles are well-structured scientific papers that provide a proper introduction into their subject, follow a stringent methodology, and clearly present their source material. Beyond that they present precisely traceable results, in some cases (self-) consciously contradictory with previous research. Precisely because of the thematic diversity of the contributions the volume is highly interesting and I'm sure that it presents some new foundations and new ideas for future research into historical European and Asian martial arts.