

The Fencing Books' collection of the Festetics family

Mátyás Miskolczi

Acta Periodica Duellatorum Association

Acknowledgment: The reproductions of the Fencing Books in the library of the Helikon Palace are made available for research purposes by the owner (the Festetics family), according to a research agreement with the Acta Periodica Duellatorum Association (2022). The desiderata for further research includes codicological description, description of its content and filiation, as well as research on the fighting traditions documented in the corpus (9 books).

The library of the Helikon Palace Museum is located in the Festetics Palace in Keszthely, Hungary. The palace was built by Kristóf Festetics in the fashionable late Baroque style between 1745 and 1750, then further expanded by his grandson, György I. Festetics - by 1804 the southern wing of the library was completed. Finally, Festetics II. Tasziló formed the present-day, U-shaped form of the palace in 1883-87 by building the tower and the north wing.

The Festetics family continued to inhabit the palace until 1944. After their emigration, the palace was nationalized in 1948. Inside the building, the library itself was managed by the National Széchényi Library. At this time, it was given the name "Helikon Library", referring to the literary meetings organized by George I of Festetics (1817-19). Today's Helikon Palace has been an official museum since 1974, one of the main attractions of which is the hall library. In the 1970s and 80s, the entire building was renovated.

The only intact aristocratic private library in the country today is an exhibition space and research library. The contents of the library were collected and expanded from the time of Christopher Festetics until the family left. The content of the library is still considered a core exhibit of the museum. The son of Christopher, Festetics III. Paul significantly increased the collection, e.g. by subscribing to newspapers and magazines.

His son, George I, Festetics, doubled the size of the collection. In the age of the Enlightenment and the national awakening, in addition to fiction and philosophy, developed sciences and economic literature were also important to the educated nobility who were patrons to the museum, so it was included in the collection. It is small wonder that George I needed to have the library wing refurnished with Slavonian oak bookcases and a gallery (by János Kerbl, a local carpenter). He developed the cataloguing system still in use today, which is a division of the various sciences. The categories contained in the bookcases can be read above the shelves. He also prepared regulations for the respective librarians performing tasks; liaised with all major booksellers and, over time, he also established a bookbinder in Keszthely. Georgikon, the first agricultural college in Europe, which he founded, also opened a library for teachers and students. Overall, he was a

conscientious book collector and developed a library so complete that little more than occasional maintenance and updates were required of his heirs.

The collection was, of course, expanded by subsequent generations, but little conscious effort was invested into the development of the library after the death of George I the library grew according to the interest of the family members. The son of George I, László Festetics, was more interested in antiques and rarities. Festetics II. Tasziló collected literature on horse breeding and contemporary horse racing calendars. However, the small library his wife, Lady Mary Hamilton, had brought with her, expanded the library with a multitude of French and English romantic novels.

As we have no data available about the old library purchases, it is very difficult to say when, from where and through which family members a work came into the collection. The textbooks on fencing would be of interest to any military man. Among the Festetics of Keszthely, this is most likely to be George I. Festetics (1755–1819), the former Graven hussar; Lt. Gen. Tasetiló Festetics I (1813–1883); but even Festetics III. György (1882–1941) fought with honors in World War I.

Based on the ownership marks (stamp, inventory number, entry), the fencing manuals in question were purchased, acquired, or possibly even given as gifts by the Festetics, etc. Interestingly, despite their seemingly similar subject matter (swordsmanship), they were classified into two different sections: the Militaria (military) and the Oeconomia et Technologia (economy and technology) sections. Most of the books which the subject matter was related to sport activities were classified under the latter section (economy and technology), because of the number of books dedicated to hunting and equestrian sports from the end of the nineteenth century onwards.

I. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Talhoffers Fechtbuch, Ambraser Codex, 1459 (Prag: Gustav Hergsell, 1889). 220x290mm, thickness: 22 mm. 45 pages, incl. 118 plates

Talhoffers Fechtbuch, Gothaer Codex 1443 (Prag: Gustav Hergsell, 1889). 220x290 mm, thickness: 29 mm. 42 pages, incl. 160 plates.

Josef Ott, Lithografirte Abbildungen zum zweiten Buche des "System der Fechtkunst" à la contrepoinde auf den Hieb und Stich, mit dem Säbel, Spadon oder Palasch, für den Einzelkampf Mann gegen Mann (Olmütz: Buchdruckerei von Franz Slawik, 1853). 260 x 150 cm, thickness: 4 mm. 43 tables

Josef Ott, Das System der Fechtkunst á la contrepoinde für den Stoss und Hieb: Zum Unterrichts in Fechtschulen, sowie zur Selbstbildung [...] (Olmütz: Buchdruckerei von Franz Slawik, 1853). 128x197 mm, thickness: 10 mm. 157 pages, incl. 32 plates.

Carl Timlich, Gründliche Abhandlung der Fechtkunst auf den Hieb zu Fuss und zu Pferde zum Gebrauch der Cavallerie [...] (Wien: Familie Van Ghelen, 1796). 175x233 mm, thickness: 7 mm. 55 pages, incl. 18 plates

Jean-Antoine Saint Martin, L'art de faire des Armes réduit a ses vrais principes (Wien: Janne Schrämble, 1804). 185x230 mm, thickness: 15 mm. 164 pages, incl. 72 plates

Johann Georg Paschen, Kurtze iedoch Deutliche Beschreibung, handlend Vom Fechten auf den Stoss und Hieb [...] (Hall in Sachsen: Melchior Oelschlegel, 1659). 190x305 mm, thickness: 9 mm. 32 pages, incl. 43 plates.

Louis Vendrine, Instruction de l'art a faire les armes (sine loco, 1810 (?)). 175x223 mm, thickness: 16 mm. 6 pages (47-52).

Carl Timlich, Abhandlung der Fechtkunst auf den Stos mit corographischen Kupfertabellen (Wien: bei dem autor und in comission, bei Peter Rehm's selig Wittwe, 1807). 85x115 mm, thickness: 6 mm. 55 pages, incl. 33 plates.