

## **Evidence of the relationship between Spielleute and Fechters**

When reading the turn of the Century German works of Authors such as, Alfred Schaer and others, the unique relationships between the Spielleute or Playpeople and the Fechters becomes obvious. Their inter relationships, mutual understandings, and Agreements together, all reveal a unique symbiotic existence. (without being mutually exclusive) As far back as Tacitus in his early Germanic Works, tells of the Sword Dance and the how the Youthful Germans relished in it.\* In fact Prof. Schaer contends that the original Dances definitely had a religious meaning. And could be regarded as the fore runners of the combat plays and knightly Arts exercises. \*

The influence of the Early Greek and Roman Cultures on the germanic peoples is also obvious, Especially the Fighting Arts, as many germanic tribesmen were taken as prisoners of War or otherwise enslaved, with many becoming Gladiators for the entertainment of their captors. These fighting Arts were retained and passed down to further generations. It cannot be overlooked that the Germans participated in the Crusades. Many of the Knights and Barons returned home with a new look on Culture and Warfare. This influence on Germany is apparent when one looks at not only the Language Arts, but the Arts of War and all the support mechanisms in Society for them. The entertainment was regulated by the religious fervor of the Church. They saw to it that offensive content was forbidden. Punishment for infringing on this Canon Law was severe. Adherence to a Guild's orders was popular, and the various Pfeifferbruderschaften developed with self appointed and so-called "kings" or play counts, these Guilds were under the care and protection of Princes and other gentlemen, and also in direct relationship with the Church. \*

As the Knightly age died out and more courtly Customs were purged, this led to an increase of upward mobility of the middle class, The blooming of the German Reich as an Empire unto itself, also the Craftsmen now had trade work from the Rich and Royals. Instead of as indentured servants. The Armies were now led and organized by the municipal authorities, the cities had their own troops and also their own Play people, who would dress in City Colors for festive causes.\* The Cities had their own musicians too, the Fifers and Trumpeters, Drummers, the Army Trumpeters differing from their civilian counterparts. The Poetry and Songs that once were only about the Knights and their affairs, now were greatly mutated and disfigured, from their original dry and monotonous form to a more freely and easily flowing form of Poetry. \*

O Wittstoeck in his essay "About the Seven sword dances of Saxonia (in the philological studies, anniversary publication for E. 1896, pag. 352 FF.) referred to the possibility of such connections between fencing school and sword dance.\* Several times Alfred Schaer mentions the works of Wittstock in reference to support the assertion that the Sword Dances were in early times considered a Martial occupation, and that the Fechters shared an understanding of the origins and importance of the Sword Dancers.

Clearly there was a connection between the Fencers and the Sword Dancers. This tradition can be traced back to the early 13th Century. Through various documents on Fechtschulen, mostly then know as Schirm Schulen, and Festival Occasions. They would normally perform at Events such as; Weddings. Baptizing Ceremonies, Reichs Tag, Church Celebrations, Processions, play performances et. which took place often all to easily and frequently. Also they would offer their services to the Generous and art loving municipalities.\* Also in the many poems of the time, there is revealed a sense that many performers of varying degrees of fame etc. would give

is revealed a sense that many performers of varying degrees of fame, etc. would give performances that were talked about for years. Also the Poems that are known as the Fechtschulen Reime, these indicate an entertaining portion of the Art. But whether a travelling road show of sorts or a Legitamate Fechtschulen, the two participated together. However, the Arts differed in their applications. It has been stated that another common reason for these Sword Entertainers was the relaying and adoring of History through the Sword Acting. We see in the Latin novel Ruodlieb and in the Gudrun song, the methods the Singers used to weave a Story of History into their songs,\* These songs would arouse courage by praising the ancestors. Much the same affect that Beowulf had.\* This would create an extraordinary image of the Fechters. Just as today when a Fighter enters the Ring, Music is played the lights change colors, and the drama is created. They also sought to highlight the dance like movements that spring forth when fencing. The audience still today, revels in a good Choreographed Swordfight. The over exaggerated, slow and deliberate movements, the Performer acting ultra focused, appears to be the highest authority on the Matter! Especially to the uninformed.

And yet actually they were considered complimentary to the Fechters\* Although it has been surmised by Alfred Schaer that some of these Sword Dancers were apparently Martially skilled. Unfortunately, no clear indication as to where and when the Dancers skills were learned, we can only surmise that this skill was probably taught through the various Guilds and Brotherhoods that formed even early in the 14th Century. Mostly, whenever a Fechtshulen was held, we see the SchwertTanzers there, again these Festzeiten or Festivals contained multiple sub events within them. A Carnival like atmosphere must have existed. A place to escape the perils and rigors of Life then. And as a performer, to earn some money.

The Fencers with their weapons sought to better their opponent through the application of the Arts. The others sought to entertain while building up to the actual fighting.

These entertainers probably used the imminent violence, as an opportunity to parody or make Comical within the Drama, Highlighting the Lofty Sword Strikes a sort of Tribute to the Blows and Strikes of Earnest Fencers. Many peoples of the lower classes, would wander the Land, plying their show, along the way learning new techniques, eventually forming guilds of their own. Once again we see the name Kurschners in an early reference to where the Art in various Sword Dance guilds came from. Predominantly in the South of Germany.\*

Towards the end of the 17th Century these Arts were on the decline, and rapidly degraded in quality of performance. The singers and Poets arts let themselves be degraded to the flat and inferior Mach works of the Speakers and Pritschmeister. this decline directly parallels that of the once Proud Kampfer and Fechtschulen.\* Even in their ending together, we see the relationship of the SpielLeute to the Fechters.

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**\* The above article was mostly arrived at from select translations of Alfred Schaer's Die Altdeutsch Fechter und Spielleute, 1901.**

References:

The following list is from Schaers work, these Cities and Dates indicate times when a

several of these listings cannot be verified as having Schwertanzers in attendance, still that means many did.

Augsburg: 1500. 1509. 1547. 1615. 1637. 1651. 1661. (1700?) 1719. [1741.] 1776. 5. Dezember 1815. Berlin: 1581. Winter 1802/3. 12. Juni 1807.  
Braunschweig: [1443.]  
Breslau: 1280. 15. Juni 1567. 1575. 1582.  
10. Juli 1589. 1592. 19. April 1593. März 1594. 23. November 1597. 5. April 1598. 9. April 1600. 14. September 1614. [23. Februar 1620.] 5. April 1625. 1636. 25. September 1644. 15. August 1672. 14. April 1715. 1735. 5. November 1741. 27. Februar 1808. 31. Juli 1808 (im Lager von Lissa).  
Brieg: Mai 1577. September 1582.  
Danzig: 3. Juli 1623. 18. Februar 1646. 1651.  
Darmstadt: 1816,  
Dresden: 27. September 1614.  
Düsseldorf: 19. Juni 1585.  
Frankfurt a. M. : 1397. Mai 1671.  
Hamburg: 5. April 1810.  
Heidelberg: 1386.  
Karlsruhe: 16. April 1811.  
Krakau: 1583.  
Leipzig: Pfingsten 1533. (1567?) 14. Mai 1604. 8. Juli 1612.  
Linz: 1783.  
Lollar (bei Giessen) : [1651.]  
Lübeck: [vgl. Z. f. d. A. XX., 10 ff., ein erhaltenes, aber undatiertes Schwerttanzspiel.] (One held but undated SwordDanceGames)  
München: [1537. 1561.]  
Nürnberg: [1350. (1351?)] Fastnacht 1477.  
20. Juni 1478. Januar 1479. Oktober 1479. 17. März 1487. [1490.] 4. Oktober 1492. S. Oktober 1493. 19. April 1494. Weihnachten 1495. [1497. 1511. 1516. 1518. 1537. 1539. 1540. 1546. 1558. 1560. 1561.] 1561. [1570.] 1576. 26. April bis 4. Oktober 1579. [um 1580.] 17. Juni 1582. 1588. 1593. [3. und 13. Februar 1600.] 14. Februar 1600. 1603. 5. Januar 1607. 1612. 1615. (1697?) 21. November 1698. Prag: 1608.  
Schmalkalden: [1576.]  
Solothurn (Schweiz): [1549. 1581.]  
Strassburg i. E. : 5. und 26. November. 3. Dezember 1559. 1587. Januar 1664.  
Stuttgart: 29. September 1560. November 1575. Mai 1585. 12. März 1596. 1602.  
Thorn: 1612. 1614.  
Troppau: 1583.  
Überlingen a. Bodensee: [1581. (1670.) 27. Februar 1794.] Ulm: 1514. [9. Februar 1551.] 1551. 1610. 1698.  
Weimar: Mai 1584.