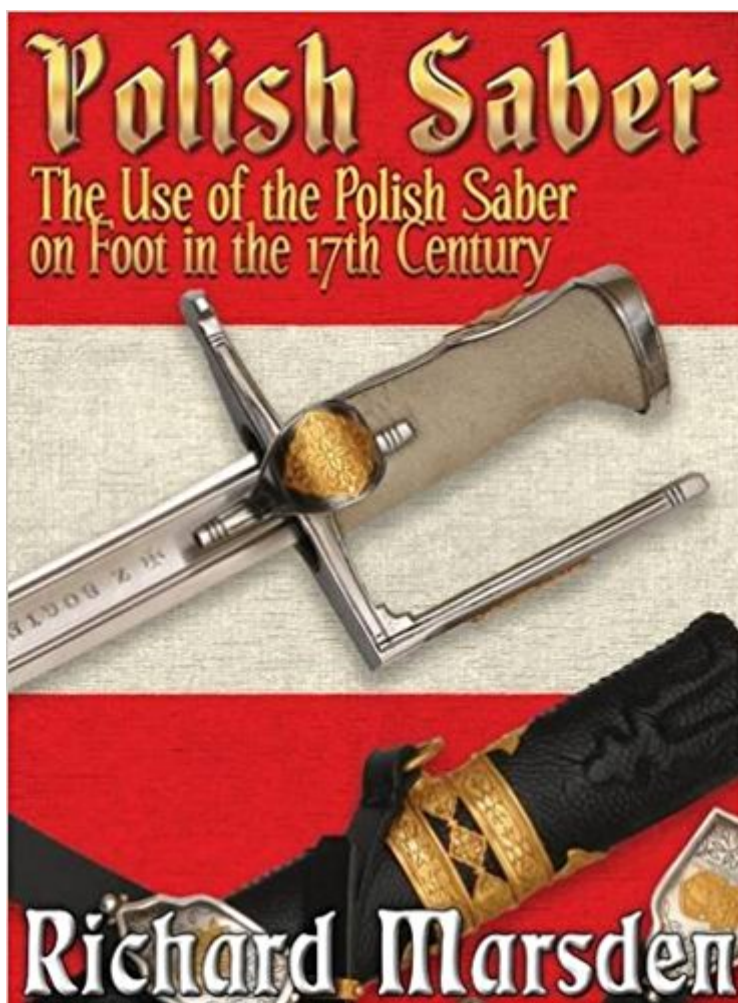


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# The Polish Saber



## Synopsis

Polish Saber - The use of the Polish Saber on foot in the 17th century covers the history, anecdotes and use of Poland's iconic weapon. In matters of honor and personal safety the saber was the Polish nobleman's choice of arms. The concept of the duel, the form and function of the weapon, as well as source material from Poland, Italy and Germany are blended together in an interpretation presented in full-color. The work is suitable for history enthusiasts, Historical European Martial Artists and re-creationists who wish to explore Poland's Commonwealth and the weapon that symbolized its nobility.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

only shows the front and back cover of this rather impressive piece of both weapon history and use. The Bibliography on pages 232 and 233 demonstrates both the extent of the research, and the challenge. There are not many sources for any kind of saber, much less the rather distinctive Polish saber. This partly reflects the current, still early state of rediscovery of the *fechtbuch* - historic sources on the use of hand weapons, particularly for the duel. The oldest sources seem to capture the most attention the result being the intense interest in 133 and the longsword of Fiore. Despite the long lineage of the saber, to Western audiences it tends to invoke the image of Napoleonic cavalry. This brings up the other challenge faced by the author a relative scarcity of sources on the weapons of Central Europe, and a lack of knowledge of the theater. I was aware Poland was a major European power off and on for nearly two centuries, but until reading this work, I did not know

the Thirty Years War largely missed the country. Fortunately, Mr. Marsden was quite willing to provide the necessary context. The extensive large format color photographs and illustrations make this work somewhat unique so far, in a book of instruction on the use of a historical fencing weapon. There have been many "coffee table" books, perhaps of similar size but not as long, depicting swords and other hand weapons, and some references on their use. However, this is an example, and probably a new example, of a "coffee table book" which can be used to learn a martial art. This book was a project, and a quick review of the five page illustrated "Acknowledgements" section shows that while the author was key, this was a team project, necessitated by the somewhat exotic subject matter, and the relative lack of English sources. Instead of relying on long quotes, there are a total of three chapters devoted to original sources: Polish, Italian and German. Reading a translation of an original essay or memoir from 17th Century Poland was more directly informative than reading an elaborate explanation. (Including the Messer from the German sources might be a "stretch", since the relatively short, thick blade handles much differently, from personal experience.) The book excels in developing the context of the form of the Polish saber in both form and use. The irony here is profound, given the author currently being the President of the HEMA Alliance, and so many of its readers likely to be members of that organization, or similar groups. These practitioners go out of their way to differentiate themselves from those who attempt to create an immersive sub-culture – going so far as to ensure their club logo is featured prominently on kit, for reasons I suspect go beyond advertising. It was as if they were concerned re-creating court intrigue might somehow distract from "the art" they are so devoted to bring back to life. Slightly more than half of the work is under "Interpretation", and this is where the format is probably ground breaking. In the vast majority of instructional books on swordsmanship, the readers must squint at a small grainy black and white image housed in a soon-to-crumble "perfect" binding. My version is hefty, hardcover and full color, which helps many, myself included, more quickly assimilate the image. If I want to look at the grip being used, I don't need to wonder what a close up might have looked like, I can see it in the full figure photograph. The importance of the work transcends the specific subject matter – more books like this are needed for more weapons forms.

Richard Marsden's organization in this book is exceptionally well suited to facilitating the evaluation and refinement of his interpretation of the primary sources on the use of the Polish saber in the 17th

century. Included are significant selections from English translations of utilized primary texts and breakdowns of techniques, each technique referencing the relevant primary source with an excerpt; the total effect of Mr. Marsden's work here is a thorough and rational foundation, assembled in light of practical experience and academic insight, which may serve as a valuable platform from which to launch into the next explorations of how the eastern wielders of the saber employed this weapon to build such fearsome reputations. Though I generally find Richard Marsden's work to be useful, I am especially impressed by his pragmatic and exacting approach to this discipline and his contributions to its rediscovery. If you are interested in learning the fundamentals of historical saber techniques, this is one of the texts I would strongly recommend.

A thoroughly excellent read, with excellent images and an incredibly clear view into the academic process involved in recreating the art of the Polish Saber. Clearly documented segments on the affiliated history, discussing the actual details of what makes up a Polish saber and how the weapon evolved, then detailing the different sources used to reconstruct the art itself. Moving from that into the actual discussion of the use of the saber itself, then detailing how this development can be brought into the modern HEMA setting. Read it once just for the pleasure of seeing how it was brought together, I'm expecting to be reading through this a number of times and gleaning more from it on each reading.

A truly excellent resource that is understandable! It put me in mind of the many lessons my grandfather's taught me back in the 50's & 60's (they were as they put it some of the "last-honest-to-Gawd-sit-on-an-oatburner-cavalrymen". To me, that is high praise for this book, though admittedly there is none of the "spit tobacco in your opponent's eyes" techniques (LOL) but the skill set on saber usage this book teaches is tremendous.

This book strikes a great balance between anecdotes, explanation of sources and related material, and detailed depictions and explanations of techniques. Being new to historical European martial arts but having done sport fencing in the past, I found the book engaging and very useful. It didn't hurt that I'm fascinated by the history of this period and region as well. I would recommend this book to anyone interested in history, swords, or HEMA, whether they are just getting started or a long time enthusiast. It's very well organized and even with the wealth of information and background, is a very quick and enjoyable read.

Full Disclosure: I know the author. The book is well written and has lots of good historical references and photos of their interpretations of the moments for Polish saber. It is written in an easy to understand manner, and covers this rather obscure fighting style with great thoroughness.

Extremely well thought out approach to a historical presentation of a martial art. Marsden presents his case from his chosen sources which lends a respectable credence to the system he presents in the book. Few others have presented interpretations, adaptations, and/or translations of historical martial arts with such skill and thoughtfulness. Special kudos to him for including not only utilizing his own tribe in creating this work, but a myriad of the HEMA community.

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