

Title: Rapier Combat: A Practitioner's Thoughts

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Date Started: 13/11/01

Date Finished: 03/03/03

Edited: 03/03/03

Subject: Rapier Combat within the SCA

Rapier Combat within the SCA is an attempt to recreate one of the civilian forms of combat that existed in the Renaissance period. This form of combat is centred on the rapier and its companions. It is important to realise that it is the rapier that is being focused on otherwise a great deal of confusion will be created.

In recreating this form of combat we use simulated weapons in a semi-competitive combat form. The weapons only differ essentially from the real weapons in that they have a blunt edge, and a rolled tip, which has a rubber stopper over it. The metal blades are very close to the actual weapon in weight and handling characteristics. The fibreglass blades are much lighter than real ones, but can be made in such a way that they do simulate a rapier in a reasonable fashion. Importantly the fibreglass weapons are cheaper to purchase, and are great for starting students.

The combat form itself, in tournaments, is an attempt at recreating the lethality of the rapier in a combat situation, without the blood and burial costs. A win is scored by "rendering one's opponent disinclined to continue", this could mean a kill or disarm, or sufficient scratches. The whole body is a target, though the groin area is not deliberately targeted. We are assumed to be wearing civilian attire and as such any cut or thrust has to be judged as if the weapon was real and had hit flesh. This means that a combatant has to be really careful. It is also this reason that a lot of skill rather than brute force goes into this form of combat.

What we do is kept safe by our safety and armour standards. Most importantly amongst this is the control that we instil into our students while they are in training. The best method to keep safe is to teach and learn control. The armour standard is there just to bolster the safety of the combatants.

Where does this form of combat fit into the "medieval" period? Simply, it doesn't. It is a Renaissance form of combat. Earlier forms of combat using thrusting weapons have been theorised as the predecessors of rapier combat. A great deal of the techniques which are used in rapier combat were developed as the rapier did. Cut-and-thrust technique is one of the predecessors of the rapier's technique and it is from this that a lot of the style was developed.

The rapier combat which is engaged in within the SCA is based on principles developed by the Renaissance masters combined with the safety standards to ensure that it is as safe as possible. Some of the techniques, which the masters of the Renaissance taught, are not used, as they are much too dangerous to recreate safely.

There are certain social aspects, which are important to include in recreating this form of combat. These social aspects are important so that the rapier combatant is correct in his manner. Such aspects are honour, courtesy and the gentleman. Another thing that is taken into account is the different schools of rapier combat that existed in the Renaissance period. It is important that people examine these so that their style can more accurately reflect the styles of the period. The most influential schools of the period were the Italian and Spanish. The French school later dominated, but the Spanish school lasted a great deal longer.

Rapier combat fits in the SCA as one of the three combat arts that are offered.

The Guilds of Fence for each Kingdom, where they have been created, operate to inspire and encourage rapier combat to develop to a better standard. Membership to the Guild is not compulsory for rapier combatants, but it does give combatants something else to aspire to than just championships and tournament wins. The Rapier Marshalate is the administration branch of the rapier community. It is this group which administers safety and performs authorisations of combatants. The purpose of the Rapier Marshalate is to ensure that rapier combat is being performed safely and within the standards which have been set.

Rapier combat has elements, which you will not find in heavy or light combat, but there is no way that it can be persuaded that it is better or worse. Each combat form has elements to contribute. There is so much information about rapier combat in its various forms, and thanks to the Internet there are is large amount of Renaissance period manuals available for research. Combatants often find that the closer they go to a period form the better they do. Aside from all of that, rapier combat can be a lot of fun also.