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László Marácz[1]

Saber Fencing and the Remaking of the Hungarian State

Abstract

In Hungary, fencing, especially saber fencing is considered a national sport and an inherent part of Hungarian national identity. Although Hungary, following France and Italy, was one of the pioneers in developing the fencing sport in the second half of the nineteenth century, only in the course of the first half of the twentieth century did Hungary take the lead in developing new techniques, tactics and training methods for saber fencing. As a result, between 1908 and 1964 Hungarian saber fencers dominated the international individual and team competitions. Almost all the gold medals at the Olympic Games in saber fencing in that period were won by Hungarian athletes. In this paper, it will be argued that saber fencing was of major importance in the remaking of the Hungarian State which collapsed at the end of the First World War as part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (K. und k.) and had to be rebuilt as an independent, sovereign nation. The conditions for peace concluding the First World War for Hungary were laid down in the Treaty of Trianon (1920) that was perceived as a 'dictate' by the Hungarians. The state institutionalization of fencing, at that time in the form of sport fencing growing out of war and duel fencing, took place in the framework of the Hungarian Army, was supported by the highest Hungarian authorities and succeeded to counterbalance the impact of the Treaty of Trianon. Major driving forces for the remaking of the Hungarian state and the reconstruction of Hungarian identity were influenced by internal and external factors. The internal factors include on the one hand, the establishment of institutes for military fencing and gymnastics education by the Hungarian authorities in the second and the third decade of the twentieth century and, on the other hand, the efforts of outstanding fencing masters educated in the K. und k. Army, like László Borsody in the supervision of these institutes. One of the external factors was the active sports diplomacy of the Netherlands, a neutral country during the First World War, aimed at bringing back the Hungarian fencing federation into the international fencing networks after Hungary was excluded from international sports competitions after the First World War because it sided with the Central Powers.

Keywords: Hungary, sabre fencing, Treaty of Trianon, László Borsody, sports diplomacy

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1. Introduction

This paper will pursue the following line of argumentation. First, we will discuss the Hungarian archetype. It will be argued that an important feature of the Hungarian self-image is the saber as a 'Hungarian' weapon. This is associated with the tradition of the Hungarian cavalry and its mounted soldiers, the so-called 'hussars'. The hussars, who feature prominently in Hungarian culture were instrumental in war fencing with sabers. Basically, the development of Hungarian sport fencing followed a pattern similar to that in other European countries, like France and Italy. It grew out of war fencing and duel fencing. War fencing was practiced by Hungarian officers who were mostly educated in the Military Fencing and Gymnastics Instructors' Course of the Austro-Hungarian Army, the so-called Theresianum in Wiener Neustadt. Civilians, however, were prepared for duel fencing at the fencing schools that opened their doors in the first half of the nineteenth century all over historical Hungary. In the beginning these civilian fencing schools were supervised by foreign, i.e. French and Italian fencing masters. Sport fencing was established in the course of the second half of the nineteenth century in the framework of the first Hungarian sports clubs initiated by prominent members of the Hungarian aristocracy and modeled after English examples.

Next to the introduction of sport fencing in the early sports clubs Hungarian saber fencing was guaranteed in the framework of the Royal Hungarian Army that provided positions for the fencing masters educated in the Military Fencing and Gymnastics Instructors' Course in Wiener Neustadt. In the beginning of the twentieth century fencing in Hungary was characterized by a double rivalry. There was the hegemonic struggle between the fencing masters and officers of Austria and Hungary competing for the title of best military fencer in different categories of the K. und k. Army every year. In Budapest, especially after the Hungarian millennium, there was rivalry between the civilian fencing clubs led by Italian masters and the military fencing clubs led by the fencing masters educated in Wiener Neustadt.

The motivation for sport fencing under military guidance came as a reaction to the Treaty of Trianon which was concluded between Hungary and the Allied or Entente Powers on June 4, 1920. The Treaty of Trianon which was perceived by the Hungarians as a 'dictate' dismantled the Austro-Hungarian Empire and marked the new borders of the Hungarian state reducing its territory by more than two thirds of its pre-war size and leaving one-third of ethnic Hungarians as 'minorities' in the neighboring successor states. The post-World War I national leadership of Hungary based on the National Army led by Admiral Miklós Horthy came to power in Hungary after a turbulent period. In the second and third decade of the twentieth century, this leadership facilitated the development of modern military fencing and gymnastics instructors' institutes. The objective was to improve the physical condition of the Hungarian Army but also to raise the level of sports in order to compete in the international arena. The directors of the educational fencing institutes were Hungarian officers from the former K. und k. Army and the instructors were fencing masters and sport instructors educated at the Theresianum. The most talented Hungarian fencing master, László Borsody, a graduate of the Theresianum was appointed head fencing master of the newly established, post-War institute. In relative anonymity, Borsody and his staff developed new techniques, tactics and training methods which resulted in a Hungarian fencing style or school that spread over to the civilian fencing clubs as

well. This constellation formed the basis of the world-class Hungarian saber fencing hegemony which contributed to the remaking of the Hungarian state and the reconstruction of Hungarian identity as a fencing nation around what was perceived as the Hungarian weapon par excellence, the saber. The saber fencing hegemony served to strengthen national and/or collective identity after 1920. External factors, like international sports diplomacy also facilitated this process.

The first delegation of saber fencers that attended Budapest were from the Netherlands. The Dutch fencers visited Hungary as early as 1922, when Hungary was still excluded from participating in international sports competitions by the international sports federations as a result of its role in the First World War on the side of the Central Powers. The Dutch delegation was led by one of the most outstanding Dutch fencers of that time, the Dutch army officer Captain Arie de Jong. The Netherlands had remained neutral during the First World War and was considered a friendly nation by the Hungarians. Hence, the Dutch fencers were allowed to train in the Hungarian military institutes and Dutch sports diplomacy became instrumental in bringing back the Hungarian fencing federation into the international sports networks and competitions.

2. Saber fencing and the Hungarian archetype

Elsewhere I have argued that the archetype of the Hungarian is a 'fighter' (Marácz, 1996; Marácz, 2007a; 2007b). This archetype has determined the self-images, images and stereotypes of the Hungarians throughout the ages. The Western stereotypes and images of the Hungarians accommodate the Hungarian archetype and fit into two categories. The Hungarian is either a freedom fighter, if he is on the side of the West; or a rebel, if he is in conflict with the West. I have studied the political stereotypes and images of the Hungarians in earlier work (Marácz, 1996) and I have found that the archetype of the fighter extends to other domains as well, like the cultural one (Marácz, 2007a; 2007b). In this paper, I will argue that the Hungarian self-image of saber fencing as a national sport clearly belongs to the Hungarian archetype of the 'fighter'. If we search for the historical roots of saber sport fencing in Hungary we have to discuss the historical roots of the 'saber' and its references first.

The 'saber' is a weapon used by the military, more precisely by the light cavalry regiments in war fencing. The standard outfit of a historical Hungarian mounted soldier called 'huszár' "hussar" included a 'saber', in Hungarian called 'szablya'.[2] A military saber was usually a curved, single-edge blade sword made of iron, typical for horse cavalry or horsemen warriors. These soldiers used to fight with sabers mounted on horseback (Marácz, 2017: 336-337). The etymology of the Hungarian word for sabre 'szablya' contains the root word 'szab' 'to cut' that expresses its function as a 'cutting' weapon. According to the etymological studies of the origin

2 See the prominent position of the Hungarian soldiers and the saber in Hungarian literature Szalay (1932). Hungarian literature and poetry is a rich domain to study the Hungarian archetype, self-images and self-stereotypes.

of equivalents of the Hungarian 'szablya' in other European languages, i.e. 'sabre' in English and French, 'sciabola' in Italian, 'sabel' in Dutch, 'szabla' in Polish, and 'sablya' in Russian, all have a Hungarian origin and relate to the earliest times when Hungarians settled in Europe from their Central Asian 'Urheimat' and brought with them the 'saber' (Marácz, 2017: 336-337). The role the Hungarian light cavalry with its elegantly dressed hussars was reinforced in the process of maintaining Hungarian sovereignty in the 15th and 16th century, when threatened either by the Osman or the Habsburg armies (Kun, 1969: 52-55; Földes, Kun, & Kutassi, 1977). The format of the Hungarian hussar regiments spread over Europe and was integrated into a number of European armies (Ádám, 2019). As I will argue below in more detail, the military tradition of war fencing largely contributed to the development of saber fencing as a national sport in Hungary. To distinguish the military saber from the sport saber the Hungarian language uses nowadays a different word for the saber of sport fencing, i.e. 'kard'. This word contains the root 'kar' which means arm. The sport saber is seen as an extension of the arm that needs manipulation in order to fence the opponent. Hence, 'kard' refers to the lighter saber used in sport fencing, while 'szablya' refers to the heavier saber used in military fencing.

Another form of fencing that contributed to the development of Hungarian sport fencing is the tradition of dueling with swords. Duel fencing to settle issues of grievances and conflicts had a long tradition in Europe as well as Hungary and was closely related to the expression of a masculine dominated society with the preference not to settle these in court but in an arranged one-to-one fight.[3] In Hungary, duel fencing for the purpose of defending one's honor was fought with sabers. Duel fencing appeared late into the first half of the twentieth century (Clair, 1930).[4] In the late nineteenth century rules were devised to diminish the risks of death.

3 See Hadas (2003: 85-103) for a detailed discussion of the relation between duel fencing guided by masculine honor and sport fencing in the course of nineteenth century Hungary.

4 Although duel fencing was illegal in Hungary before World War I it was widely practiced, even in the circles of sport fencers and athletes. In an interview with Géza Horváth (2014, interview July 11, 1976, Utrecht) the Hungarian-Jewish Second World War resistance fighter Sándor Baracs who settled in the Netherlands in 1927 refers to a duel in 1913 between twofold Olympic champion Jenő Fuchs (1908 London, Stockholm 1912) and his own uncle Marcell Baracs, a lawyer in Budapest, and a talented sabre fencer who trained under Italo Santelli. Fuchs challenged Baracs for a duel on saber to settle a case in court, where they both worked as lawyers. The duel took place and ended with a face scratch harming the twofold Olympic champion Fuchs.

A duel for preserving the code of honor between the Italian top ranking fencer Oreste Puliti and the Hungarian referee György Kovács was the result of a series of incidents concerning the Italian top ranking fencer at the 1924 Paris Olympic Games. This is referred to in the literature as the Puliti Affair (Terret et al., 2007). The Italian delegation got furious about the fact that the threatening remarks of Puliti against Kovács were mediated by the Italian national coach of the Hungarian saber team, Italo Santelli who was viewed as a traitor by the Italian fencing delegation. It came to a duel in November 1924 at the Yugoslav-Hungarian border on the Hungarian side in Nagykanizsa. Both men injured each other and Puliti apologized to Kovács for his behavior. According to the Dutch sabre fencer Adriaan Egbertus Willem "Arie" de Jong who participated as a fencer and referee in the Paris 1924 Games he was invited as a referee for this duel. He refused because he did not want to get involved in a "hornet's nest". According to him, the Austrian fencing master Dr. Otto Herschmann became the referee in this duel and Puliti lost the duel because he was hit by Kovács with the back of

A popular set of conventions for dueling was compiled by Vilmos Clair, a lawyer by profession. The first edition of his duel codex appeared in 1897 and was reprinted 29 times (Clair, 1897; Felső-Előri Cseresznyés, 1901). The 29th version was published at the end of the Second World War in 1944. The existence of a codex in order to regulate dueling with saber can be seen as a blueprint for the elaboration of conventional rules regulating sport fencing. The first version of the internationally accepted rules for sport fencing, the so-called 'green book' was compiled by the Hungarian fencer and sport diplomat Dr. Béla Nagy in 1902. After it was translated into French it was accepted by the fencing authorities of ten countries as the basis for fencing conventions first applied at the intercalated Olympic Games of 1906 in Greece (Földes et al., 1977: 205). Hence, war fencing and duel fencing offered the basis for sport fencing in Hungary (Barta, 2016).[5]

3. The early period of sport fencing in Hungary

Sport fencing started in Hungary in the course of the second decade of the 19th century at the beginning of the modernization drives under the guidance of Count István Szechényi. It was his aristocrat friend and liberal Transylvanian statesman, Baron Miklós Wesselényi who founded in 1824 the first fencing school in the Transylvanian town of Kolozsvár (today's Cluj-Napoca in Romania) as the *Kolozsvári Viadal Iskola* (Fencing school of Kolozsvár). A few years earlier, in 1818, in Kolozsvár fencing was taught by an Italian fencing master Gaeteno Biasini (Kilyéni, 2009). A year after the fencing school in Kolozsvár opened its doors a fencing school initiated

the saber that is flat into the abdomen (See the interview with Arie de Jong Leeuwarder Courant, October 26, 1956, p. 13). Terret et al. (2007: 1282) rightly point out that the number of incidents provoked by Puliti in the overheated atmosphere of the fencing tournament of the Paris Summer Olympic Games should be analyzed in a political and cultural context. They argue that the tensions had to do with a quest for national prestige of the three nations with chances to win Olympic medals in the fencing events at the 1924 Paris Summer Games. France was the organizer of the 1924 Summer Games and had the interest to win medals at home. The aggressive attitude of the Italian team had to do with the fact that the Italian fencing delegation came under the spell of Mussolini's Fascism. Finally, Hungary could participate in the Olympic Games again after it was excluded from the Antwerpen 1920 Summer Games, because of fighting on the side of the Central Powers in the First World War. On top of the quest for national prestige there was the strive for the hegemony of the fencing schools concerned, i.e. the Italian, French and Hungarian ones. All this was embedded in the conflict between the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the International Fencing Federation about the mandate of the IOC to interfere in the appeal belonging originally to the authority of the international sports federations. The honorary jury of the IOC decided to rehabilitate Puliti in 1925 inadvertently taking the side of Italian Fascism. Next to the national and the international institutional aspects of the Puliti Affair there was the issue of masculine honor that went beyond the traditional concept of aristocratic masculinity. By the end of the nineteenth century it was an essential feature of middle class male behavior across Europe.

5 This is true for other European countries as well. See Garry (2019) for France. A comparative study has to make clear what the exact relation between the three types of fencing is and what weapon or weapons were favored in the different countries involved.

by Count Szechényi was established in Pest, i.e. *Nemzeti Vívó Intézet* (National Fencing Institute). The status of the association was set in the atmosphere of the National Renewal, the so-called Reform Period, that pushed forward the modernization of Hungary led by liberal aristocrats, like Szechényi and Wesselényi (Boskovics, 1983: 6-7; Marácz, 1996: 37). Only Hungarians could be members of the National Fencing School and even youngsters of poor civilian families that could not afford to pay the association fees could attend the fencing lessons (Földes et al., 1977: 127). The National Fencing School also served a latent recruiting function for the army. In this way young civilians could be brought into contact with the military profession. Fencing was important to make young civilians available for the military struggle at the front in order to defend the homeland (Földes et al., 1977: 129). In the following quote from one of the most ardent supporters of the fencing sports among the liberal aristocrats of the Reform Period, Baron Miklós Wesselényi, the echo of the Hungarian archetype is resonating:

> "It is for no nation more common and necessary to handle its saber well like the Hungarian because it has to thank the saber for everything there is and what he has."[6]
>
> (translated by the author)

The first fencing masters of the National Fencing Institute were Frenchmen, i.e. Ferenc Friedrich and Lajos Chappon but, in the thirties, teaching in the institute was delivered in Hungarian. Chappon points out in his fencing textbook published in 1839 in German that fencing has a lot of benefits for everyday life. It makes the body more mobile, provides tactics for self-defense to counter the dangers in life and argues that even military officers should improve their fencing knowledge. It is not enough what they have learned in military schools. Both French fencing masters were joined by a young Hungarian assistant fencing master József Keresztessy who would develop the classical Hungarian saber fencing style which relied heavily on military saber fencing.

The Hungarian gymnastics school was banned for a few years from functioning and could only open its doors again in 1830s. This was due to an order by the Austrian Chancellor Clemens Metternich who had banned the gymnastics association in Germany from functioning in the 1820s – the so-called 'Turnsperre' - because they were suspected of secretly attempting to overthrow the existing order by introducing revolutionary ideas and the idea of a German nation state. Metternich ordered a similar ban for the rest of the Habsburg Empire as well. Since 1830 the number of fencing schools quickly increased throughout Hungary. The French gymnastic instructor Ignác Clair founded the Pester Gymnastische Schule where alongside gymnastics fencing was being taught to the youngsters of Pest. Because of the Hungarian defeat in the 1848/1849 anti-Habsburg Revolution and War of Independence the fencing clubs were

6 In Hungarian: "Egy nemzetnek sem lenne illőbb és szükségesebb a kardját jól forgatni tudni, mint a magyarnak, mert ami és amije van, azt ennek köszönheti!". Quoted in the documentary film about László Borsody by Simonyi Magyarszablya (2018).

closed down until the second half of the fifth decade (Földes et al., 1977: 483; Kilyéni, 2009: 8). After they reopened, their main function apart from improving the physical fitness of their members was to prepare them for dueling and to present fencing demonstrations in front of a large audience.

Apart from the civilian fencing clubs that were spreading all over Hungary and Transylvania the education of war fencing remained the responsibility of the army. The education of military fencing instructors took place in the Austrian Theresian Military Academy in Wiener Neustadt.[7] After the 'Ausgleich' between Austria and Hungary in 1867, in fact a compromise between the Emperor Franz Joseph and the Hungarian aristocrats, the Habsburg Empire gained a dual structure. The head of state was Franz Joseph, Emperor of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy and King of Hungary (K. und k.). The Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Defense and Finance were incorporated but apart from that Hungary's status remained equal to Austria's. In the framework of the K. und k. Hungarian officers could receive fencing education at the Military Fencing and Gymnastics Teacher's course. In the Theresianum there was a typical Central European atmosphere with first rank fencing masters, like the Croat Milan Neralić and the Italian Luigi Barbasetti. The Hungarian fencing style was also represented due to the fact that Rittmeister Gusztáv Igalffy descendant of a Hungarian military family and the commander of the Military Fencing and Gymnastics Teacher's Course from 1885-1887 was himself a war saber fencer as a cavalry-man. Barbasetti who represented the Italian fencing style was extremely influential in Europe because of his widely-distributed textbook on saber fencing in German 'Säbelfechten'.[8] The Theresianum was the starting point for many of the Hungarian fencing masters that played an important role in the establishment of saber fencing in post World War I Hungary.

4. The establishment of sport fencing in Hungary

The introduction of sport fencing started with the establishment of the first Hungarian sports club, i.e. Magyar Athletikai Club (MAC) initiated by Count Miksa Esterházy and Lajos Molnár in 1875. The athletics sports club was modelled after English examples due to the fact that Count Esterházy had been a counselor at the Austro-Hungarian Embassy in London and had studied the establishment of the English sports clubs in London. MAC received a fencing department as well. The model set by MAC spread over the country and in Kolozsvár the Kolozsvári Athletikai Club (Kolozsvár Athletics Club, KAC) was founded in 1885 with its own fencing department (Kilyéni, 2010: 73-75). The first fencing master of MAC became József Keresztessy who elaborated the Hungarian saber fencing style which was close to war fencing. It was this Hungarian style of fencing that would be challenged by Italian fencing masters that

7 See K. und k. Militär-Fecht- und Turnlehrer-Curs in Wiener-Neustadt. 1892. *Der K. und k. Militär-Fecht-und Turnlehrer-Curs in Wiener-Neustadt.* Wien: K. und k. Reichs-Kriegs-Ministerium; and Bartunek (1904) for more details.

8 The German version appeared in 1898 in Vienna; the English version in the United States in 1936.

brought with them a lighter weapon more suitable for sport fencing. As a result, around the millennium, the techniques and tactics of sport fencing in Hungary changed decisively.

On the 20th of May 1894, MAC organized the first national fencing demonstration in Budapest and in 1895 the first international fencing competition. Sport fencing in Hungary received an enormous boost due to the fact that fencing events were part of the official program of the Hungarian National Millennium Exhibition to commemorate the Hungarian Conquest of 896 AD and the foundation of the Hungarian state in 1000 AD under the first Hungarian king acknowledged by the Vatican, St. Stephen (Marácz, 1996: 33-37). Between May 14-20 in 1896 a big international fencing competition took place in the big hall of the 'Vigadó', a large concert hall on the eastern bank of the Danube built in 1859. 140 fencers participated in the millennium fencing competition including the best fencers of Europe at the time (Földes et al., 1977: 205). The category of masters was won by an Italian fencing master from Florence, Italo Santelli, who was educated in the 'Scuola magistrale militare di scherma di Roma'. Due to his victory in the millennium fencing competition he was offered a contract as a fencing master by MAC which he accepted. Later he established his Salle Santelli in Budapest and was influential in Hungarian fencing three decades following his appointment at MAC. With the millennium fencing competition Hungary became integrated into the international fencing circuit. From 1900 onwards Hungarian fencers participated in the Olympic Games and in 1902 Dr. Béla Nagy wrote his first proposal for universal conventional fencing rules. A year before the International Fencing Federation (Fédération Internationale d'Éscrime, abbreviated FIE), in 1912, the Hungarian Fencing Federation (Magyar Vívószövetség, abbreviated MVSz) was established with Dr. Béla Nagy as its first elected chairman. Nagy became a sport diplomat of international reputation as the first vice-president of the FIE where he continued to work on unifying the rules for sport fencing.

The first great success in Hungarian sport fencing was the winning of the gold medal both in the individual and team sabre competition at the London Summer Olympics of 1908. The individual competition was won by the Jewish-Hungarian lawyer Jenő Fuchs (Onyestyák, 2013: 762). The successful performance in London in saber fencing was the starting point of the Golden Age of Hungarian saber fencing which lasted until the Summer Olympic Games of 1964 in Tokyo, when Hungarian athletes won the individual and team saber fencing competitions, with just two exceptions: that of the 1920 Antwerpen Summer Games where the Hungarian Olympic team was not allowed to participate due to Hungary losing the First World War as a member of the Central Powers; and the 1924 Paris Summer Olympic Games where the team final against Italy was lost (Kun, 1969: 111; Keresztényi, 1976: 281).

5. Military fencing and László Borsody

Next to the civilian fencing clubs, such as the MAC and Salle Santelli, sport fencing also benefitted from the military fencing tradition. Most of the fencing masters who were educated at the Military Fencing and Gymnastics Teacher's Course at the Theresianum in Wiener Neustadt stayed in the army teaching fencing to the cadets. An exception was Captain Gusztáv Arlow the offspring of a military dynasty who attended the course of military fencing master at the Ther-

esianum but decided to leave the military profession in 1894 and established his own fencing schools (Miklauzič, 2015: 10-11). After having established his own fencing club he kept in contact with his former teacher at the Theresianum, Luigi Barbasetti. During his Wiener Neustadt years he already wrote a textbook on saber fencing.[9] Arlow is the author of one of the most important textbooks on saber fencing in the Hungarian language that gives an overview of the innovations of the Italian style but also summarizes the characteristics of the Hungarian style to be integrated into the new style.[10] One of the students at the Military Fencing and Gymnastics Teacher's Course was the warrant officer László Borsody who would become the most important Hungarian fencing master of the twentieth century.

Borsody was born into a poor Jewish family in a small village called Farmos in Pest County on the 6th of September 1878.[11] In Royal Hungary, nationalism and national consciousness was growing by the fin-de-siècle. The Borsody family converted to Catholicism and 'magyarized' (translated into Hungarian) its German last name 'Pfeffer' into Borsody. The 'magyarization' of last names was a rather common practice among those who wanted to climb up the social ladder in the multi-ethnic Hungarian part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. During Borsody's student years at the University of Law in Budapest he improved his fencing skills under the supervision of fencing masters, like Béla Kodesch, Gyula Rákossy, and Virgilio Giroldini. Borsody joined the Royal Hungarian Army after he was expelled from the university due to illegal duel fencing in 1899. A year later he was sent to the Theresianum in Wiener Neustadt to complete the Military Fencing and Gymnastics Teacher's Course. Very soon Borsody became the assistant fencing master of the head fencing master at the Theresianum, Milan Neralić. Between 1902 and 1914 the two capitals of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, Vienna and Budapest alternately offered the venue for the annual fencing competitions for the officers and fencing masters of the Common Army of Austria-Hungary. László Borsody was very successful in these competitions and won nearly all of them both on saber and foil.

The competition of 1906 was attended by the Emperor of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy and King of Hungary, Franz Joseph. Franz Joseph was so impressed by the fencing style of Borsody that the Hungarian King appointed him by decree to fencing master second class. From 1902 until 1925, László Borsody taught fencing at the Royal Hungarian Ludovica Defense Academy in Budapest, i.e. Hungary's officer cadets training institute prior to 1945. In 1916 he was designated head fencing master and promoted to the rank of captain. In the Aus-

9 See Arlow, Gusztáv, Frans Litomyský. 1894. *Systematisches Lehrbuch für den Unterricht im Säbelfechten aus der Hoch-Tierce-Auslage*. Wien und Leipzig: Wilhelm Braumüller.

10 See Miskolczi (2018) for an excellent overview of the early Hungarian textbooks on saber fencing. The books on sport fencing appeared at the end of the 19th century and around the millennium and are written mainly by military fencing masters educated at the Theresianum, like Arlow, Bartunek, Chappon, and Leszák.

11 For the biographical data on László Borsody I heavily rely on the detailed research work of Norbert Máday, a Hungarian grandmaster in the martial arts. See Máday (2017a; 2017b) and the documentary film about Borsody by Simonyi Magyarszablya. Norbert Máday should be given credit for making lots of information accessible to the wider public about the fencing work of Borsody.

tro-Hungarian Army ranks mattered a great deal. Only high ranking officers could be head fencing masters.

The tensions between Austria and Hungary in the framework of the Dual Monarchy that became stronger by the end of the nineteenth century could also be felt in the domain of fencing. A decree by Emperor Franz Joseph ordered the military staff of the Austro-Hungarian Army to fence for the Austrian Olympic delegation and not for the Hungarian team at the Summer Olympic Games of St. Louis in 1904. Hence, two candidates for an Olympic medal in fencing, the hussar officer Captain Béla Békessy and Captain Ervin Mészáros chose not to participate (Szikora, 2013: 9; Máday, 2017a: 431; Máday 2017b: 202). The Hungarian military fencers were banned for the same reason from participation in the Hungarian fencing team in the 1908 London Summer Olympic Games (Földes et al., 1977: 205). The split between Austria and Hungary became definite as a consequence of the outcome of the First World War in which the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy collapsed at the end of the war.[12]

6. The consequences of the Treaty of Trianon

Hungary was severely punished by the victorious Entente and their Associated Powers for her membership in the Germany led coalition of the Central Powers. For Hungary the First World War formally came to an end with the Treaty of Trianon concluded on the 4th of June 1920. Hungary's territory was diminished by more than two-thirds of the size it used to have as a member of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy and one-third of its ethnic Hungarians ended up as 'minorities' in the enlarged or newly established neighboring successor states (Marácz, 1996: 130). The British, who did not want the French to have absolute power in Central Europe, gave their approval for the regrouping of a National Hungarian Army to be formed in Szeged. It was to be commanded by Admiral Miklós Horthy, commander-in-chief of the Austro-Hungarian Navy and a close confidant of Emperor and King Franz Joseph. Admiral Horthy became Regent of the Hungarian kingdom after the conclusion of the Treaty of Trianon in 1920.

Although the Hungarian state was severely reduced after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy, it regained its sovereignty. The Hungarian state had to rebuild its own institutions and regarding the Military Fencing and Gymnastics Teacher's Course the Hungarian Army could no longer rely on the facilities provided by the Theresianum. On May 1, 1920 the Hungarian Ministry of Defense launched its own fencing and gymnastics teacher's course, i.e. the Hungarian Royal Military Fencing and Physical Education Course at the Ludovica. The course that lasted for eight months served to educate certificated military sports teachers. The teaching staff consisted of military officers who were educated in the Theresianum, like Borsody who was appointed fencing master.

12 See Marácz, 1996: 113-213 for the First World War and the Trianon Treaty and its consequences for Hungary.

Although the Treaty of Trianon restored Hungarian sovereignty, it excluded the rearmament of the Hungarian Army. Any activities connected to the creation of a new army were strictly forbidden. Hence, the Military Fencing and Physical Education Course had to close down on July 1, 1922 due to Article 111. of the Treaty of Trianon stating:

> "The number of students admitted to attend the courses in military schools shall be strictly in proportion to the vacancies to be filled in the cadres of officers. The students and the cadres shall be included in the effectives fixed by Article 104. Consequently all military schools not required for this purpose shall be abolished" (Martin, 1924: 500).[13]

Only in 1925 was the fencing teacher's course allowed to restart in the framework of the Hungarian Army but now embedded in a broader sports instructors' course. The course moved from the Ludovica Academy to another venue in a Budapest military camp. On May 1, 1925 Borsody, then in the rank of major, was appointed head fencing master of the fencing department of the Royal Hungarian Military Sport Instructors Course. Here Borsody started to develop his own methods for saber fencing and continued to train his future champions with much energy. He became responsible for the training program and received support from Regent Horthy and his government. This meant that the dynamics of the development of the fencing sports in Hungary definitely shifted from the civilian clubs dominated by fencing masters, like Italo Santelli to the military institutes, even if Borsody was also active as the head fencing master of MAC from 1922 to 1938 and a number of military fencers were also members of civilian clubs, like MAC. Borsody was the maker of a number of champions. Under his guidance, Hungary won in saber fencing 18 gold and silver medals by nine different Olympic athletes; 18 gold and 45 silver medals at saber fencing world championships; Borsody supervised 15 European champions and 24 European military champions and his pupils won 124 Hungarian national titles (Máday, 2017a: 578-579).

After the First World War the former Central Powers, including Hungary were excluded from participation in international sports life. In 1919, all sports diplomatic relations with Hungary were broken off, apart from the ones with the former Central Powers i.e. countries like Austria, Germany and neutral Switzerland and Sweden. Hungary suffered a so-called 'sports blockade' which lasted until 1923, when a few of the national Hungarian sports federations were allowed to join again their international federation (Szikora, 2012: 541). The IOC discussed the exclusion of the sports federations of the former Central Powers at its meetings in Lausanne and Antwerpen in 1919 and could not arrive at a decision on the issue. Instead, the IOC decided that Belgium, i.e. the organizing country of the 1920 Antwerpen Games should take a decision and the Belgian organizers decided to exclude the former Central Powers

13 See under Chapter 3, recruiting and military in Martin (1924). Article 104 of the Treaty of Trianon under chapter II effectives and cadres of the Hungarian Army states: "The total number of military forces in the Hungarian Army shall not exceed 35,000 men, including officers and depot troops. The Hungarian Army shall be devoted exclusively to the maintenance of order within the territory of Hungary, and to the control of her frontiers (Martin 1924: 498).

and the Soviet-Union from participating in the Antwerpen Games. Hence, the Hungarian Olympic delegation was banned from the 1920 Antwerpen Summer Olympic Games (Kun, 1969: 111). The sports blockade against Hungary was lifted just before the 1924 Paris Summer Games. This to award Hungary for joining the IOC concept of 'sports without politics' and for not supporting the counter sports blockade initiated by Germany.

7. The Dutch saber fencing connection

Concerning the FIE, Hungary was excluded as a member since 1918 (Szikora, 2013: 11-12). The French who dominated the FIE in the post-war years successfully lobbied for a ban on the participation of the athletes from the former Central Powers, including the Hungarian ones (Terret et al., 2007: 1287). As early as 1922 a Dutch fencing delegation visited Budapest for fencing training.[14] These visits would be intensified in the course of the decade. The Dutch fencing delegations were led by Captain Arie de Jong, one of the most talented Dutch fencers of his time.[15] The first 'international' fencing competition the Hungarian saber fencers participated in was the Hungarian national championship of 1923 because the Hungarian organizers had allowed the Dutch saber team to participate. Only Arie de Jong made it to the final with nine other Hungarians.

The Netherlands had been neutral in the First World War and had managed a delicate balance of power politics with respect to the continental European powers before the War.[16] After the First World War the Netherlands wanted to stay neutral and maintain its sovereignty by serving the cause of international order and peace. It wanted to prevent a unilaterally dominated Europe by the Entente and their Associated Powers. In the League of Nations, which it joined in 1920, the Netherlands was afraid that without Germany, or the former Central Powers the League would be an instrument of power in the hands of the Allied or Entente Powers (Van Diepen, 1999: 59). Hence, the Netherlands was willing to support Hungary to return into the international diplomatic networks, including the ones of sports. Apart from the political interest and the fact that the Netherlands offered a diplomatic channel to break out of the isolated position caused by the sports blockade, the Hungarian fencing community was enthusiastic about the participation of the Dutch fencers in Hungarian training sessions and competitions because they were at an acceptable level and were hard working during their Budapest visits. Dutch fencers like Arie de Jong, Henri Wijnoldy-Daniëls, Jan van der Wiel and others visited Budapest to train with the Hungarians on a regular basis. Gradually the relationship between these Dutch fencers and fencing master Borsody strengthened and the Dutch fencers benefitted from the innovations Borsody was making in the techniques and

14 See Marácz and Máday (2019) for data on the historical fencing relations between Hungary and the Netherlands.

15 This is also referred to in the textbook on saber fencing by László Gerentsér, one of the most important Hungarian fencing masters in the first half of the twentieth century Gerentsér (1944: 327).

16 See Hellema, 2009, chapter 2.

tactics of saber fencing. The Dutch initiatives to bring back Hungarian fencing into the international circuits were sustained on the highest political and diplomatic level. In line with the Dutch foreign policy concept of balance between the countries of the continental political blocks in the League of Nations we may speak of a 'fencing diplomacy'.

George van Rossem, a fencer himself, participant in the Olympic Games, sports diplomat chairman of the International Fencing Federation (FIE) from 1925 to1928, and chairman of the organizing committee of the successful Amsterdam Summer Olympic Games visited Budapest on the 8th of June 1925. The Dutch sports diplomat had been elected president of the FIE at its 1925 congress due to the fact that the French president André Maginot did not always respect fair play and favored his French athletes too outspokenly (Kun, 1969: 104). The Dutch Minister of Defense Johan Lambooij officially accredited the Dutch and Hungarian fencing exchanges. As a result, László Borsody was invited to the Netherlands for the European Military Fencing Championship organized in The Hague in May, and June 1927 to give demonstrations and lessons to his Dutch saber fencing students, like Arie de Jong. The demonstrations of the fencing professor, as Borsody was called in the Dutch press, were enthusiastically supported by the Dutch Royal House, both Queen Wilhelmina and Prince-Consort Hendrik attended the demonstrations of Borsody in The Hague.

The 1928 Summer Games of Amsterdam were a reference point for Borsody. Borsody visited the Netherlands a year before the Amsterdam Games and this visit to the Netherlands served also as a Hungarian preparation for the Amsterdam Games. The objective of Borsody was to win the two saber disciplines in Amsterdam, both the individual and the team competition. It turned out to be a successful endeavor. A Hungarian officer, Ödön Terstyánszky, one of Borsody's most dedicated students became Olympic champion saber individually in a legendary Hungarian-Hungarian final against Attila Petschauer.[17] In the team final sabre, archrival Italy was defeated, making up for the defeat against Italy in the 1924 Olympic final of Paris.[18]

After his victory on August 12, Ödön Terstyánszky went to London to meet Lord Harold Rothermere, a conservative aristocrat, member of the House of Lords and owner of the British newspaper the Daily Mail. Lord Rothermere was the only Western politician who openly supported the Hungarian efforts to revise the Treaty of Trianon (Marácz, 1996: 49). In the article published on the 21st of June 1927 in the Daily Mail Lord Rothermere called for the Treaty of Trianon to be revised. He pointed out how unfair the treaty was and the British conservative supported the view that areas along the Hungarian border that were chiefly populated by Hungarians should be given back to Hungary. Lord Rothermere launched a campaign which he called 'Justice for Hungary'. The article published in The Daily Mail was attacked by a furious barrage of counterpropaganda generated by France and the Little Entente countries (Marácz, 1996: 169). The whole issue blew up into a media war and did not subside until 1929. The

17 There were several Hungarian fencers of Jewish origin among the Olympic winners in the first half of the twentieth century who suffered a tragic faith in the Second World War after being persecuted by the Nazis or their Hungarian collaborators. Attila Petschauer was one of them and died in a forced labor battalion (Onyestyák, 2013: 763).

18 See George van Rossem (1928: 561-643) for the report of the fencing competition at the Amsterdam Olympic Games in 1928.

French and British government also put pressure on the Hungarian Prime Minister István Bethlen to moderate the tone of the articles published by the British Lord (Romsics, 1989: 181-183).

As a sign of respect for his pro-Hungarian stance, the fresh Olympic champion presented Lord Rothermere his saber as a gift with which Terstyánszky fenced the final in Amsterdam (Máday, 2017a: 30). When Terstyánszky returned to Hungary to meet his fencing master, Borsody qualified Terstyánszky's deed to give his saber to Lord Rothermere, the only Western European politician who criticized the Treaty of Trianon as follows:

> "Your deed is worthy of a Hungarian army officer, worthy of Hungarian sabre fencing."[19]
>
> (translated by the author).

On March 1, 1932 the Royal Hungarian Military Sport Instructors Course was replaced by the Toldi Miklós Royal Hungarian Military Academy for the Education of Hungarian Sports Instructors and Fencing Masters (abbreviated as SPOTI). Until his retirement in 1936, Borsody remained the head fencing master of SPOTI and continued to generate sabre fencing successes. László Borsody completed his mission, namely to counterbalance the humiliations of the First World War and the Treaty of Trianon and to restore national prestige on the piste with the Hungarian weapon, the saber. His heritage would be continued by his students, such as the military officer György Piller (Jekelfalussy), who was educated by him at SPOTI between 1925-1927 and became Olympic champion saber individually and with the Hungarian team in Los Angeles in 1932 (Polgár, 2017).

8. Conclusions

In this paper, I have argued that saber fencing was instrumental in the remaking of the Hungarian state after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy at the end of the First World War and the establishment of the new Hungarian state after the conclusion of the Treaty of Trianon containing the conditions for peace between the Allied and Associated Powers and Hungary. Saber fencing is connected to the Hungarian archetype, i.e. the Hungarian as a 'fighter'. The Hungarian cavalry with its so-called hussars and the tradition of their weapon, the saber, perceived as the 'Hungarian' weapon perfectly fits into this scheme. As a consequence, the sport version of the saber became the suitable tool to strengthen national and/or collective identity in the interwar period. The educational facilities of military fencing and gymnastics institutes of the Hungarian Army were also established to develop successes in sport fencing. These facilities were sponsored by the Hungarian state and received support from the highest political level. Instrumental in the quest for the restoration of national prestige and the

19 In Hungarian: "Az Ön tette méltó egy magyar honvédtiszthez, méltó a magyar kardvíváshoz." Quoted in the documentary film about László Borsody by Simonyi Magyarszablya (2018).

escape from political and sports isolation were the outstanding Hungarian fencing masters, like László Borsody who were educated at the Theresianum. In these strives, Hungary also received external support from the Netherlands. This country had remained neutral in the First World War and initiated sport diplomacy, i.e. 'saber fencing diplomacy' to bring Hungary back into the international fencing networks and competitions during the period of sports blockade from 1918-1924. Hungary was excluded from the international sports community because it sided with the Central Powers in the First World War. This 'sabre fencing diplomacy' was in line with the Dutch foreign policy to include the former Central Powers into the international political organizations, like the League of Nations, to counterbalance the political influence of the Entente and their Associated Powers in postwar Europe. Hungary welcomed the Dutch 'saber fencing diplomacy' because the Netherlands was considered a friendly nation and they had an excellent generation of military fencers in the Netherlands that were eager to learn from the Hungarian fencing masters, like László Borsody. Apart from the Hungarian interest to break out of international isolation the Dutch connection was relevant in the preparation of the Hungarian successes at the 1928 Amsterdam Summer Games which Borsody targeted as the first real challenge for his newly developed Hungarian saber fencing style.

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