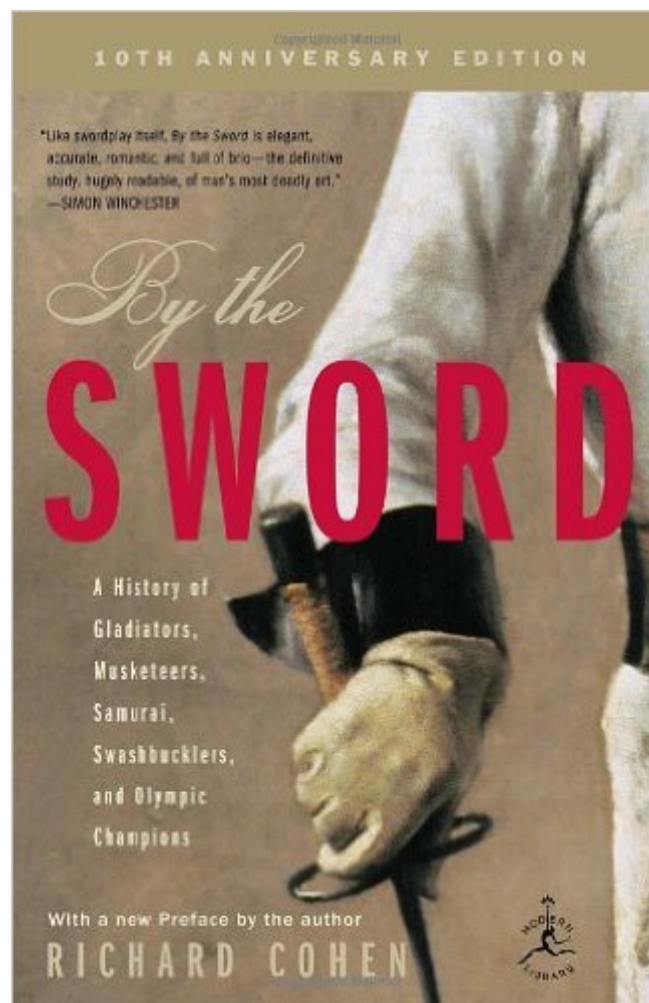


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By The Sword: A History Of Gladiators, Musketeers, Samurai, Swashbucklers, And Olympic Champions; 10th Anniversary Edition (Modern Library Paperbacks)



Synopsis

Napoleon fenced. So did Shakespeare, Karl Marx, Grace Kelly, and President Truman, who would cross swords with his daughter, Margaret, when she came home from school. Lincoln was a canny dueler. Iqantius Loyola challenged a man to a duel for denying Christ's divinity (and won). Less successful, but no less enthusiastic, was Mussolini, who would tell his wife he was a goof to get spaghetti, their code to avoid alarming the children. *By the Sword* is an epic history of sword fighting—a science, an art, and, for many, a religion that began at the dawn of civilization in ancient Egypt and has been an obsession for mankind ever since. With wit and insight, Richard Cohen gives us an engrossing history of the world via the sword. With a new Preface by the author

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Customer Reviews

When I wrote my first review of this book I had just read the first two chapters and I was incensed at the number of mistakes they contained. I've now read the rest of the book and have received correspondence from the author. My view of the book is now a little different. Don't get me wrong, the chapters on the early history of fencing are still replete with errors. To answer some points made by other reviewers, horse armour WAS in the vicinity of 60lbs, not 450, for example, the 15th century Gothic horse armour that forms the centrepiece of the Wallace Collection weighs 66lb, 5 1/2 oz. Medieval fencing systems did rely heavily on parries with the sword. For example, Manuscript I.33, a sword and buckler (small shield) manual and the oldest extant fencing text displays parries with the blade on about 35 of its 64 plates. These far outnumber the parries made with the buckler.

The reviewer who claimed that the blade was not used for parries might care to explain this manuscript and indeed all the other medieval manuscripts, because every one teaches parries with the blade, from I.33's overbinds and underbinds to Fiore Dei Liberi's incrosada's, Ringeck's absetzen etc. etc. La Destreza, the system of Spanish rapier fencing created by Don Hieronymo Carranza may not be comprehensible to Mr Cohen, but it is comprehensible to me. It is more than comprehensible to Maestro Ramon Martinez, the world's foremost expert on the system, who as Tony Wolf stated, lives in the same city as Mr Cohen. I have fenced Spanish rapier and consider it to be a superb and most logical system. In fact Maestro Martinez and I have written a paper on the system. Too many hatchet jobs have been done on La Destreza. Carranza's contemporaries (such as George Silver) wrote in praise of his system.

I am surprised by the extreme number of basic factual errors in this book. In a single reading of the first two chapters I identified numerous errors including the following, 1) "A horse's armor could weigh up to 450 pounds" - more like 602) "parries were not attempted" - the world's oldest fencing manual (Mss I.33 c.1300 - which the author refers to) is full of parries. 3) "the use of heavy armor and heavy weapons allowed only simple movements, forcing contestants to concentrate on one blow at a time, so that complicated phrases were impossible." - complicated fencing phrases are described in medieval fencing manuals, including those referenced by the author. 4) "Up until the start of the sixteenth century there were few solid principles of how best to fight with swords. Masters, mainly army veterans, passed on a hodgepodge of techniques" - There are approximately 50 medieval fencing manuals, all of which describe advanced fencing systems that conform to the same fundamental principles of timing, distance and line that underly modern fencing. 5) "Johannes Lecktuchner, a famous master at Nuremburg. Lektuchner's treatise is full of hints about feints, secret thrusts, and surprise parries." - the man's name was Liechtenauer and he described an incredibly subtle and sophisticated system that dominated central Europe for 250 years. The system is described in exquisite detail in Christian Tobler's excellent book "Secrets of German Medieval Swordsmanship". 6) Of Talhoffer's treatise "it is as much a manual for survival as a book about fencing." - As the word fencing is derived from the word defence, this statement is tautological. 7) "Marozzo was the first to establish a regular system.

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