

REVIEW OF / RESEÑA DE: Hing Chao, Daniel Jaquet and Loretta Kim (eds.): *Martial Culture and Historical Martial Arts in Europe and Asia: A Multi-perspective View on Sword Culture*. Springer Nature, Singapore, 2023, 381 pp. ISBN: 978-981-19-2036-3.

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This pioneering book is in the realm of *Martial Studies* of the series edited by Mingda, Ma and Lianzhen, Ma. Emerging from the proceedings of the third International Martial Studies Conference, 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> December 2020, this book weaves together the historical insights and cultural perspectives in a manner that transcends conventional boundaries of current literature. The interdisciplinary masterpiece draws from a vast array of sources including archaeological discoveries, classical manuscripts, historical treatises, and recent articles. By exploring the aforementioned range of perspectives, this study offers a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted role that the sword played during the European Renaissance and China's Ming-Qing Dynasty. Thus, this book delves into the martial applications and cultural significance of swordsmanship in both regions.

The innovation of this book shines brightly through its captivating exploration of ancient rock art in Val Camonica, Italy. Unlike conventional studies that often narrowly focus on the military utility of weaponry, this book boldly ventures into the symbolic realm while uncovering the profound meanings embedded within these ancient carvings. By delving into the spiritual beliefs and cultural values reflected in these engravings, this book provides readers a fascinating glimpse into the rich tapestry of human expression spanning across Europe and the Indochinese peninsula. For instance, the evolution of sword guards in ancient China while tracing their development from the Tang to the Qing dynasty is a novel contribution of this book. Also, this book discusses the emergence of various guard types, their spread to neighboring cultures, and their eventual decline.

Through iconographic evidence and material artifacts, this book offers insights into the cultural and military influences shaping sword design over centuries. In transcending the superficial, this book provides invaluable insights into the multifaceted roles of swords beyond mere instruments of combat, while contextualizing those weapons within the broader cultural landscape and shedding light on symbols, like power, prestige, and ideology. This nuanced understanding enriches our appreciation for the complexities of martial culture, and yields a deeper insight into the societies that forged those iconic weapons of previous era.

This book delves into a unique aspect of Renaissance martial arts manuals by focusing on the concept of the dynamic sphere. This perspective challenges traditional static poses by advocating for continuous movement and efficient force usage represented within a circular framework. Through an examination of treatises by prominent figures such as Camillo Agrippa and Marozzo, this book explores fragments of an older martial arts tradition and thoroughly investigates associated anatomical foundations. A notable discussion centers around the discovery of a Han Dynasty ring-pommel dao in 2013, which served as the catalyst for a meticulous reconstruction project. This finding illuminates the significance of dynamic movement, geometric principles,

and the solar plexus as the focal point of energy in combat. Consequently, this book provides a compelling perspective on the enduring principles of martial arts, thereby making this appealing particularly to enthusiasts in European martial arts.

A comparative analysis of Italian and Chinese swordsmanship serves as major deliverable of this book, thereby illuminating the universal principles that underpin martial arts practices. While many existing works predominantly focus on the history of Asian martial arts, this book breaks new ground by juxtaposing diverse cultural traditions. This comparative approach broadens our understanding of combat arts, and highlights the interconnectedness of human experiences across different regions and epochs. Whereas the excellent text *Martial Arts in Asia: History, Culture and Politics* (Hong and Ok, 2019) deals with history of Asian martial arts in the contexts of tradition, religion, philosophy, politics and culture, and then attempts to deepen the study of martial arts studies in their transformation from traditional to modern sports, this book juxtaposes Italian and Chinese swordsmanship. This way, this book transcends disciplinary boundaries, offering a comprehensive exploration of sword culture by synthesizing archaeological findings, historical texts, and philosophical insights. One can also refer this book as a testament to the interdisciplinary nature of martial studies that invites scholars and enthusiasts alike to uncover the profound truths hidden within the art of the sword.

Detailed explorations of sword forging methods in Brescia, Italy, and the evolution of sword guards in ancient China exemplify the commitment of this book to meticulous research and depth of analysis. By uncovering the stories behind these artifacts, one can breathe life into the craftsmanship and ingenuity of swordsmiths across diverse cultures. Beyond the scholarly rigor, this book delves into the philosophical and spiritual dimensions of sword culture. Through an examination of classical Chinese texts such as Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian Han dynasty* (Sima, 1961), this book reveals how the sword transcended the role as a mere tool of combat, and becomes a symbol of moral virtue and personal development. Also, this exploration adds a profound depth to the book, thus inviting readers to contemplate the deeper significance of martial arts beyond physical technique. Thus, this book transcends disciplinary boundaries and illuminates the rich tapestry of human history. With detailed illustrations, this book also guides beginners through core Verdadera Destreza ideas while also exploring counter-techniques against its counterpart, Vulgar Fencing (Meyer, 2016). This focus on both styles, along with Ferrara's potentially original descriptions of vulgar techniques, makes this text to be a valuable resource for understanding the aforementioned historical European martial art.

The analysis of Jing Ke's assassination attempt offers a nuanced perspective on ancient Chinese sword culture. By examining Jing Ke's bravery and his limitations as a swordsman, this book delves into the cultural and philosophical significance of the way of the sword in ancient China. Additionally, the exploration of weapons and burial customs of Longobard warriors in Seprio, Italy, during the Longobard era is a distinctive aspect of this edited volume. Focused on key sites like Castelseprio and Arsago, this book provides detailed insights into Longobard weaponry, belt accessories, and burial practices through archaeological discoveries. This thorough examination illuminates the social hierarchy and cultural norms of Longobard society, thereby making this book indispensable for history enthusiasts and archaeology aficionados alike.

Moreover, this book has a dedicated chapter exploring the historical evidence of European martial arts together with a focus on the teachings of Italian master Achille Marozzo (1568). The said Opera Nova School's approach underscores a profound reverence for tradition and a thorough comprehension of historical sources. This methodology entails a cyclical progression of studying original texts, consequently engaging in practical application of techniques and revisiting the material to attain deeper insights. Thus, practitioners can acquire a broader understanding of Marozzo's historical context by scrutinizing those works of historical masters. Therefore, this book can be useful to obtain valuable insights into Renaissance martial arts for interpretation and reconstruction by future practitioners.

This way, the present seminal study significantly enhances our understanding of martial arts history and culture. The interdisciplinary approach, comparative analysis, and exploration of philosophical dimensions render this book an indispensable resource for both scholars and readers. However, there are some aspects that would have benefited from additional investigation. As an instance, delving into the socio-political contexts that influenced those aspects, could deepen our comprehension of the broader cultural dynamics at play. Nevertheless, these minor gaps hardly diminish the overall significance of this book, which remains a milestone in martial arts scholarship. This beckons readers to embark on a captivating journey through time and culture, thereby unraveling the intricate relationship between humanity and the sword. A study of this book shall enrich a variety of undergraduate and graduate classes. Moreover, any seasoned martial artist, history enthusiast, or individuals simply curious about the timeless allure of the sword can captivate a journey through the annals of martial culture and seek a deeper understanding of sword culture across continents and centuries by studying this book.

## FUNDING SOURCES

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