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BOOK REVIEWS

**Agata Maćków**, *Joseph Strutt as a writer on the history and folklore of sports*, Oficyna Wydawnicza WSJO, Poznań 2008, pp. 259.

Joseph Strutt (1749-1802) was the most outstanding English ethnographer, anthropologist and historian of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as well a European pioneer of ethnography. He was probably the first writer to be seriously interested in describing English sports and pastimes, and hence laying the foundations for future historical and ethnographic research in this area. Strutt was also interested in gathering detailed information about characteristics of the English people and presenting them to his readers. It is rather difficult to understand why scholars have underestimated his accomplishments and unquestionable contribution to the study of English culture. Everyone knows that sport is a vital part of the English nation, which is proud to have developed quite a few sports disciplines and their rules. The question remains why most contemporary scholars generally choose to ignore Strutt's spectacular achievements? (with the exception of a very few who mention Strutt in their works, e.g., Richard Holt, John Marshall Carter and the editors of *Dictionary of National Biography*.)

A Polish scholar Agata Maćków in her book *Joseph Strutt as a writer on the history and folklore of sports* makes a successful attempt to bring Joseph Strutt and his legacy out of the shadow of forgotten past. Her book is entirely devoted to Strutt and it emphasizes the respect he deserves. The most important aim of this work, however, is to place Joseph Strutt among the most outstanding figures of cultural studies.

*Joseph Strutt as a writer on the history and folklore of sports* is divided into six chapters dedicated to Joseph Strutt's life, research legacy and accounts of English sports of the nobility, common people and popular entertainment and ritual.

Chapter One titled "The life of Joseph Strutt and the background of his sports and pastimes of the people of England" discusses Strutt's life in the fullest possible detail beginning from his childhood,

innatural gifts and talents and education. At the age of 14 Joseph Strutt went to London and became an apprentice to a famous engraver where he learnt the skills so useful in his future life. After a few years in London he started studying the art of engraving at the Royal Academy of Arts. Strutt was a member of different societies and was twice awarded for his artistic achievements. As a young man he had a brilliant intellect and ambitions to achieve something great. The chapter also discusses Strutt's fascinations and aspirations as well as his financial and family situation. He appears to us as a good son, brother, and then a loving husband and father. Finally, Strutt's personal tragedy of losing his wife and then a baby daughter is presented. The readers can follow Strutt through his problems, which actually made him stronger and ready for writing.

In Chapter Two "Joseph Strutt – ethnographer or cultural historian?" Agata Maćków tries to draw distinctions between ethnography, ethnology and cultural anthropology as relevant scientific backgrounds to Joseph Strutt's research. According to Maćków, the most convenient definition of ethnology of sport was proposed by Wojciech Lipoński.<sup>1</sup> She fails to answer the question in the title and states that "Strutt could be placed in the middle – in his research he was both a pioneer ethnographer and cultural historian".

In Chapter Three, Agata Maćków notes that Strutt was a most talented writer with his own unique writing style and research methodology. Strutt's methods were as unique as the field he was trying to describe. His innovation was to write about his own, English culture, not some distant and savage one; his main objective was to save English national heritage by writing about common

<sup>1</sup> W. Lipoński, *Rochwist i palant. Studium etnologiczne dawnych polskich sportów i gier ruchowych na tle tradycji europejskiej*. Akademia Wychowania Fizycznego im. Eugeniusza Piaseckiego, Poznań 2004.

plays, games and sports meant for the general public, who knew little of their local culture. Strutt was simply aware of the people, who would read his book. The unique language style in *Sports and Pastimes of the People of England* was used deliberately by Strutt to make a vivid portrayal of 18<sup>th</sup>-century England and its culture. He made use of prose, poetry and drama but also legal documents and dictionaries to make his book as useful and versatile as possible.

In Chapter Four “Joseph Strutt and his account of the sports of nobility” the readers can learn that Strutt “was forced to rely on his own intelligence” as he had no access to ethnographic theory. But his passion and love of his nation did not allow him to leave the theory aside. For that reason he collected antiquities in order to preserve them for the posterity. Chapter Four discusses different varieties of popular sports of the nobility, e.g. hunting, hawking, horse racing, tournaments, archery, games of strength, games of ball, water sports, sedentary games and their development through time.

Chapter Five reveals how Strutt tried to examine different social roles to define some general characteristics of his contemporaries. For the purpose of his work he had to establish who the common people and the elite were, which was not an easy task those days. The chapter includes information about the conversion of some popular games of the nobility into games of the common people. In presenting the wide, historical context of English sports tradition Maćków makes references to the *Declaration of Sport* of James I published on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1618 and to the 17<sup>th</sup>-century annual

Cotswold Olimpick Games. These early events had undoubtedly some influence on the development of English attitude towards practicing sports. Then she provides examples of ‘elite’ and ‘popular’ games and contrasts them with the pastimes of the aristocracy mentioned in Chapter Four.

The final chapter is wholly dedicated to entertainment and rituals. Maćków observes here that music and drama have much in common with ‘sport’ and its etymology as provided by the *Oxford English Dictionary*. She describes some of Strutt’s examples of theatrical performances, dancing, poetry, music, animal performances and popular rituals.

Agata Maćków’s study is indeed an outstanding work on a forgotten and neglected pioneer of European ethnography. The readers are offered a great opportunity to find out about the historical background of English sports, which constitute an indispensable part of English and world culture.

One aspect missing in Agata Maćków’s book is a comparison of Joseph Strutt’s study and ideas with other works of English-language and European authors on English sport heritage, tradition and history. However, without a doubt, *Joseph Strutt as a writer on the history and folklore of sports* is a remarkable work that can be recommended to all those interested in the rich culture of English-speaking nations.

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**Zbigniew Borysiuk**, *Modern Saber Fencing* with an accompanying DVD *Saber Technique and Tactics*, SKA SwordPlay Books, Staten Island, New York 10314, USA, 2009, pp. 235.

Zbigniew Borysiuk’s monograph *Modern Saber Fencing* with an accompanying DVD *Saber Technique and Tactics* is primarily directed to collegiate fencing communities in the United States and other countries. The book consists of twelve chapters preceded by the author’s extensive acknowledgements and a preface by Edward Korfanty, U.S. Olympic Women’s Saber Coach.

Chapter One contains the author’s reflections on the Beijing Olympic fencing tournament in 2008. In Chapter Two Borysiuk outlines the evolution of all fencing weapons from combat swordplay to sport fencing. He also describes the progressive character of the Polish saber school and the contributions of the great fencing master Michał Ostoja Starzewski during the apex of saber fencing