

Cotton Titus A XXV

By Eleonora Litta¹

Amongst the few sources about long-sword that have been written in the English language in the late middle ages, there are a few lines, hidden between drafts and notes, on a paper folio which concludes a booklet containing a religious work in Latin. This quire is part of a compilation of different works, which have not relation of any kind between each other, a part from the size of the pages, bound up together in the same manuscript book, belonging to the Cotton collection.

Sir Robert Cotton was known for buying several works and binding them together according to the size of their pages. The book suffered from fire and water, and shows evident signs of damage, affecting in many parts the reading and the understanding of the texts, and even probably hiding from the eyes of the scholar some precious hints for their dating.

Transcription:

Fol. 105r/v:

Strokez off ij hand swerde

Firste a Rownde for the waste Sengyll w^t a fune
Also a quarter with a fune. A Rake sengyll w^t a fune.
A dowbull' Rownde a dowbyll' Rake with a nawke
a quarter and a Rake and a wype with a spring' vyding'
with the lyfte hand In a quarter with a fune skyping
with a wype. Than' a quarter and breke a fune atte _e ryght'
shulder with a robecke.

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Than e chase Fyrst a dowbyll' Rownde w^t a bakke fune
And a fore fine Rennyng' w^t a Robecke an an Rowndez
Voyding' with a Reste a an a bakke fune to thetone
A fore fune to the totherwith a bakke fune to e fune with a
Nawke suyng' and evere fote e hande e hye and e herte
[to accorde.

Strokes atte e ij hande staffe

The fyrst poynte is a florysh abowte the
Fynger. e nexte florysh is aboute e hande
And thanne iij quarteres and a rownde and
ij rakes and ij Fownes iij quarteres closed
at a Rownde war' hym at armes behynde and
than ij awkes for e wrong syde and an
a fune for hym in Ve toder syde and e
herte e Fote and e Eye to accorde etc.

In item 5, the notes about long-sword contained in folio 105, have a precedent in two other sources held in the British Library, London: Harley 3542, and ADD 39564. All three pieces are very similar in content and style, the language is often obscure in the definitions of the strokes and all three seem to represent a different way of giving account of fighting techniques from the rest of European fighting manuals, mostly containing pictures and longer in their explanations and descriptions. The English on the contrary, seem to consist in a list of different movements, and it is hardly understandable whether a technique is meant as offence or defence, attack or counter-attack. The Harleian and the ADD sources have been dated back to the mid-fifteenth century. Consequently, it seems highly probable that also the small notes contained in this manuscript can be ascribed to the same period.

Bibliography

Smith, Thomas, Catalogue of the Cottonian Library, (1696) ed. C. G. C. Tite, Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 1984.

