

THIBAUT, Gerard (ca. 1574-1629). *Académie de l'espée de Girard Thibault d'Anvers: ou se demonstrent par reigles mathematiques sur le fondement d'un cercle mysterieux la theorie et pratique des vrais et iusqu'a present incognus secrets du maniemment des armes a pied et a cheval, 1628*. At Leiden: printed in Elzevier typeface in August 1630.

2 parts: [222] p., XXXIII double-sheeted (except for one); [54] p., XIII double-sheeted; 2°. Engravings by Scheltte Adams Bolswert, Gerrit Adriaensz Gauw, Boetius-Adams Bolswert, Johann Gelle, Claes Pietersz Lastman, Crispin de Passe the Elder, Andries Jacob Stock, Egbert van Panderen, Peter Isselburg, Willem Jacobsz Delff, Crispyn van den Queborne, Adrien Jacob Matham, Salomon Savery, Jacob van der Borch, Robert-Willemsz Baudous, Pieter van Serwouters and Pieter de Jode the Elder. The anonymous portrait of the author is engraved after a painting by David Bailly.

Bound in parchment over board with heat-embossed stamps in the centre of covers, fillets on covers, and raised cords and handwritten title on spine. Old library reference numbers on front endpaper: CXXXIII, G. 42-n°5, 170/1/19. Handwritten notes on flypaper: 573, 6338. Handwritten note on rear endpaper: 003000.

Our copy belongs to a limited group of copies that include three additional preliminary pages: the privilege bestowed by the Emperor Francis II to the heirs of Thibault, an “*Avertissement au lecteur*” which identifies the printers, and lastly some Latin panegyrics with a note explaining the absence of a preface and, at the same time, paying tribute to the nobles and princes whose heraldic shields are included in the book. Our example is also distinguished by the absence of emblems in the heraldic devices in the upper and lower part of the author's portrait.

Gerard Thibault was born in Anvers around 1574. In 1605 he established himself as a merchant in Sanlúcar de Barrameda. There he became interested in fencing, adopting and making extraordinary developments to the “mysterious circle” method of the famous instructor Luis Pacheco de Narváez. The system was created by the Spanish masters, who sought the key to fencing in mathematics.

Around 1611, Thibault joined the fencing competition of Dutch masters in Rotterdam and his new technique achieved unexpected success. He won first prize. From that moment onward, Thibault's new art gained both fame and students. We know that he appeared in The Hague, Cleves, Paris, Brunswich and Lippe, where he was received with accolades by the various courts.

In 1622, he studied mathematics at the University of Leiden. For some time, Thibault had wished to create a great book to express all his knowledge of fencing, as the celebrated Italian master Salvator Fabris had done in *De lo schermo ouero scienza d'arme*. There is no doubt that he dedicated himself intensively to the organization of the ambitious book during his time in Leiden, writing the text, preparing the engravings, dealing with the Elzevier printers. Nevertheless, at some moment in the first half of 1627, the celebrated Thibault died without seeing his life's work completed.

The *Académie* is the most extensive and detailed treatise on fencing known to exist. The large-folio format, magnificent paper, superb typeface of the famous Elzeviers of Leiden and its engravings make the book one of the most beautiful and costly printed works of the seventeenth century.

First, the sumptuous title page contains a calligraphy title announcing the publication of a second part, never carried out, on the art of fencing on horseback. A preliminary sheet, appearing only in some copies, features the imprint of the printers, Abraham and Bonaventura Elzevier, although Thibault and his heirs acted as editors. However, it is likely that the nine princes represented by magnificent heraldic shields engraved on the pages of the *Académie* made financial contributions to the book's publication.

The fencing illustrations are of particular merit. All spread across two pages, except for one, and they depict individuals fencing in a wide variety of apparel and positions, demonstrating their art in exceptional scenes which all contain the “mysterious cycle” circumscribed in a square. Two particularly fine engravings appear at the beginning of the second section celebrating the triumph of fencing. Thibault, well-known for his qualities as a painter and architect, probably created the illustrations. With respect to the engravers, he invited the participation of an extraordinarily high number of artists, sixteen in total, who worked in the north and south of the Netherlands, with the exception of one who came from Germany.

The publications of the Elzeviers of Leiden, particularly their books appearing in small format, soon became famous for their perfection. On this occasion, however, they produced an exceptionally large work, creating special ornamentation, florets, vignettes, friezes and capitals.

The sale of book was organized by Thibault's heirs. The sales success of the work is not known. Given its size and cost, we might imagine that it would require the very eloquence and powers of persuasion of the master himself.

(MRF)