

SWORDPLAY & SWASHBUCKLERS

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[In Honor of My Fencing Masters: Hussar Swordplay on Horseback!](#)

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“THE ROYAL HUSSARS.” FORMED IN 1693, THIS FRENCH ROYAL REGIMENT OF HUNGARIAN HUSSARS RIDES PAST WITH ENEMY HEADS SPIKED ON THEIR SABERS. FROM *LES EXERCICES DE MARS: EIGENTLICHE ABBILDUNG UND BESCHREIBUNG DES SOLDATEN LEBENS NACH DER NEUESTEN FRANZÖSISCHEN KRIEGS-MANIER...* BY JOSEPH FRIDERICH LÉOPOLD, 1700. BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE.

A brief post on Hungarian Hussar swordplay on horseback, in honor of my Hungarian fencing masters: Dr. Francis Zold (1904 – 2004) and Dr. Eugene Hamori, both part of the extraordinary tradition and fame of the Hungarian fencing epoch of the past century and longer. Theirs was an era in which perhaps no more than three dozen fencers ruled saber fencing for half a century. It was a world in which swordplay and its associated honor were still entwined with world events. It was a time in which dueling was still practiced or had only recently seen its end. Many of these men were familiar with swordplay in both the duel and in sport. To learn fencing from my two masters and to hear the stories they told was like stepping into a novel by Rafael Sabatini or Alexandre Dumas.

Before I begin the discussion of hussar swordplay, here are two abridged biographies, given that this post is in honor of my fencing masters. One day I'll post full biographies of these two fascinating men.

DR. FRANCIS ZOLD, PRETTY MUCH AS I REMEMBER HIM WHEN HE TAUGHT ME AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA IN THE LATE 70S.

Dr. Zold, long a minor Hungarian celebrity and well-known fixture in Hungarian fencing, was easily recognized by the green glasses he always wore (Zold means green in Hungarian), as well as by the shout of “Hé, là! Pamela!” when a student did something well during a lesson. He was the 1948 Hungarian Olympic team captain, reportedly fought a duel (I have this from a very knowledgeable source), and was a student of the famous Italo Santelli. By the great master's own admission, Dr. Zold was one of his four greatest students: “[Jeno] Fuchs the tactician, [Endres] Kabos the attacker, [Attila] Petschauer the jumper, and [Ferenc] Zold the fighter.” (From “Francis Zold's Death” by Ko Andras, February 24, 2005.)

PHOTOGRAPH ON THE WALL OF THE SEMMELWEIS FENCING SALLE IN BUDAPEST. THREE OF THE FENCERS (PETSCHAUER, PILLER, AND KABOS) ARE MENTIONED IN THIS BLOG POST.

Regarding two of the Santelli's fencers mentioned with Dr. Zold, Petschauer was an Olympian with two gold saber medals and also a high school classmate of Dr. Zold. He was murdered in a Nazi concentration camp at the instigation of a Hungarian officer who was also a former equestrian Olympian. Kabos was an Olympian with four gold saber medals, and was serving as forced labor in Budapest at the time of his death, when Margit (Margaret) Bridge (to *Margit-sziget*, or Margaret Island) blew up accidentally as the Nazis were rigging it with explosives to destroy in advance of the Soviet army. Dr. Zold had spoken with Kabos just moments before.

Dr. Zold also assisted Raoul Wallenberg in helping Jews escape from Hungary after Nazi Germany annexed the country and began shipping Jews to concentration camps, and was one of the last to see Wallenberg alive outside of Soviet custody. (Wallenberg appears to have been murdered by the Soviet secret police after being held for two years.)

I attended the party in honor of Dr. Zold's 95th birthday (I was one of three there who did not speak Hungarian), and corresponded with him until his death, long after I had my last lesson from him in 1978. I always enjoyed his stories, as I still do Dr. Hamori's. From Dr. Zold, for example, I learned how the Hungarian fencers were invited by swashbuckling actor Douglas Fairbanks to his famous home, Pickfair, after Piller won the saber gold in 1932. Fairbanks, an active supporter of the Los Angeles Games, and his entourage came to watch the saber finals.

■
DR. EUGENE HAMORI AND I A FEW YEARS AGO IN NEW ORLEANS. PHOTO BY MARY CROUCH. (INEXPLICABLY, I'D FORGOTTEN TO BRING THE FRENCH-GRIPPED EPEE I GIVE LESSONS WITH.)

I studied fencing afterward under Dr. Eugene Hamori in New Orleans. He was a member of the gold medal Olympic saber team in 1956, defecting to the US soon after; the Soviet military had ruthlessly crushed the brief Hungarian uprising that occurred that summer. He studied fencing under Alfred Tusnady-Tschurl, graduate of the famous Austro-Hungarian fencing academy at Wiener-Neustadt; László Szabó, one of Santelli's three proteges, author of *Fencing and the Master*, and a very close friend of Francis Zold; Gyorgi Piller, student of Laszlo Borsodi (one of the creators of modern Hungarian saber technique), 1932 Olympic saber gold medalist, later the Hungarian head coach; Lajos Csiszar, also one of Santelli's three proteges; and not too long ago he even had some lessons from László Szepesi, famous as the Hungarian master who led France to international saber golds. No matter how good you are at fencing or at teaching fencing, you're never too old or too experienced to profit from fencing lessons.

An accredited fencing master among his many accomplishments, Dr. Hamori remains a close friend and is my mentor in all issues regarding the teaching of swordplay. Dr. Zold gave me my classical foundation, but it was Dr. Hamori who really put everything together for me, even though even today he gives Dr. Zold the credit. We have corresponded for years and visit whenever we can. My wife Mary and I even attended a Royal Shakespeare Company performance of *Hamlet*, suitably sub-titled (or super-titled, in that the sub-titles were above rather than below?) in Hungarian on electronic boards, on Margit Island with him a few years ago, and afterward discussed both the difficulty for even a native English speaker to grasp Shakespearean dialogue, and, as expected, the swordplay as well. (We thought the final *phrase d'armes* was a bit too quick and lacked enough dramatic emphasis, for what it's worth.)

Both of my fencing masters helped encourage my sense of literacy and broad learning (whose foundations were first encouraged by my parents and, perhaps not surprisingly to those who've read them, later by the novels of Rafael Sabatini). Fencing is simply one part of a broad education, not to mention a means of safely engaging in the martial competition natural to humans.

At *Hamlet* we also ran into outstanding HEMA longsword and modern saber fencer Krisztina Nagy. Not long before, she had escorted us around the famous Semmelweis University high school fencing *salle*, whose current fencing master is László Szepesi. The *salle*'s master from 1948 TO 1955 was Dr. László Emlékére Duronelli, the third of Italo Santelli's proteges.

■
PLAQUE, CROSSED FRENCH AND ITALIAN FOILS, AND SABER MASK IN HONOR OF LÁSZLÓ DURONELLI AT THE SEMMELWEIS *SALLE*. (LARGELY OUT OF VIEW TO THE LEFT IS A PISTOL GRIP EPEE, TO THE RIGHT AN OLD HUNGARIAN FENCING SABER.)

Perhaps the most important lesson I learned from both fencing masters is that mistakes are OK, that you learn from them, and that, as a fencing teacher, or any teacher, you don't have to know everything, and more importantly, *you must never pretend to*. Neither of my fencing masters ever pretended to me that he knew everything about fencing. Dr. Zold often referred to sources, both books and people, who knew more about a given subject in swordplay than he did, in spite of his vast experience. Dr. Hamori, in one of many examples, often demurs on giving me his answer to an epee question. A few years back he would instead consult his close friend, famous fencer and fencing master József Sákovics. Since Sákovics's passing, he has given me the recommendations of Hungarian head coach Gábor Udvarhelyi.

Too many "experts" today, or so it appears to me, would almost rather die than be seen as not having all the answers, even though it is impossible to have them all in any subject. A fulsome minority of fencing teachers (and similarly of certain personalities with PhDs, I must add) include some of the worst offenders in my experience, at times inventing empty answers and even pretending to experience they don't have. Often this is the result of the cult of personality—excessive or insecure ego, or both, seeking adulation—far too many "experts" engage in. My own fencing masters entirely avoided this. Frankly, the honest, humble practice of the pointing out the truth wherever it may lie, with the obvious benefits of doing so, is too little seen today—all the more reason I have to thank my own fencing masters, my parents, and others like them for the lessons they've imparted to me.

And Now, Hussar Swordplay on Horseback!

■
OTTOMAN TURKS RETREATING FROM A HAPSBURG MUSKETEER OR FUSILIER AND A HUNGARIAN HUSSAR. FROM ANTON ERNST BURCKHARD VON BIRCKENSTEIN, *ERZHERZOGICHE HANDGRIFFE DES ZIRKELS* (VIENNA: 1686). [HUNGARIAN NATIONAL ARCHIVES](#).

Please note that this is just a brief introduction to Hussars and their swordplay as described in a small number of *English* sources, Andrew Lonergan for the most part (citation below), with a few minor observations of my own. There are some historical fencing organizations, Hungarian in particular, who are working admirably to restore Hussar saber technique both mounted and afoot in detail.

When it comes to recreating historical fencing technique, success, particularly as defined by historical accuracy, varies. In the case of the smallsword, for example, it's relatively easy to obtain a *likely* high degree of historical accuracy, given the large number of available texts and its fundamental similarity to “modern classical” foil and epee, both of which are ultimately descended from it. On the other hand, some historical technique is poorly documented, Highland broadsword for example, and requires greater sifting through clues and the use of *intelligent* practical speculation. (There's quite a bit of unintelligent practical speculation going on, unfortunately, in historical discussions, including those on the subject of the use of arms.)

So, who were the Hungarian Hussars? They were some of the best irregular light cavalry in the world, known for their flamboyant courage in battle and their use of the saber, a curved sword descended ultimately from the cutting swords of the Mongol invaders. The hussars were extreme swashbucklers, in other words. (My own *Little* ancestors were Border reivers from the Scottish West March, another famous group of light cavalry, not to mention cattle thieves.)

To give you a better idea of who the hussars were, I'll quote from *The Sea Rover's Practice*, itself quoting from the journal of naval officer Pattee Byng: “Sicilian partisans in 1719 sniped at German and Hungarian soldiers, and Hungarian Hussars ‘with their usual custom and dexterity, struck off their heads with their sabers.’” (*Pattee Byng's Journal*, edited by J. L. Cranmer-Byng. Greenwich: Navy Records Society, 1950. Italics mine.)

The illustration above is sufficient corroboration.

In 1693 a regiment of Hungarian hussars was incorporated into the French army, although Hungarian cavalry had served Louis XIV prior to this. In the eighteenth century there were French-manned units modeled on them in place, and also other natively-manned units in other European armies as well. Hungarian hussars were in service past World War One.

■
THE KING'S REGULATION REGARDING THE FREE COMPANY OF HUSSARS RAISED BY THE PRINCE OF NASSAU-SAARBRUCK, 1748. BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE.

According to a seventeenth century English dictionary, the word hussar was said to derive from the Hungarian light horsemen's battle cry of “Husa!” However, both Dr. Hamori and a now former honorary Hungarian consul in New Orleans told me that this is not what they were taught in school in Hungary. Further, some modern etymologies, *Merriam-Webster* for example, suggest the word has its origins in the Serbian and Croatian word for pirate. The Hungarian word is *huszár*. (For a period definition and etymology, see *New World of English Words*, 2nd ed., edited by E. Phillips [London: E. Tyler for Nath. Brooke, 1662], s.v. “Husares.”)

■
A HUNGARIAN HUSSAR CIRCA 1700. FROM *NEU-ERÖFFNETE WELT-GALLERIA* (NUREMBERG: 1703). DEDICATION BY ABRAHAM A SANCTA CLARA, ENGRAVINGS BY CHRISTOPH WEIGEL AFTER CASPAR LUYKEN.

Andrew Lonnergan's practical book on swordplay, short-titled *The Fencer's Guide* (London: for the Author, 1771) is one of those rare fencing texts discussion practical swordplay beyond the *salle* and the duel: for the battlefield, in other words.

Section VIII of his book, “Is a Lesson for and against a Party of Hussars, or Light Horse.”

He refers to Hussars as “scampering troops, who like not to attack in a body, nor to attack a body [a troop, company, or other ‘body’ of horse].”

Importantly regarding technique, he notes that they “may annoy you, in wheeling together, either by fire or sword, though even if ou were a grand division, wheeling upon its center; for they endeavour to attack all other troops behind, or sideways, as they run by them, with a Sawing-cut, and then turn to the rest of them again, that they may repeat this cut with their swords so arched, that when but an inch of the edge, near the point, catches a man's neck, the middle, or belly of the blade, will sever a joint, and often leave the head hanging by a sinew, or a piece of skin.”

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HUNGARIAN HUSSAR OFFICER CIRCA 1700. FROM *NEU-ERÖFFNETE WELT-GALLERIA* (NUREMBERG: 1703). DEDICATION BY ABRAHAM A SANCTA CLARA, ENGRAVINGS BY CHRISTOPH WEIGEL AFTER CASPAR LUYKEN.

The ‘sawing-cut’ is a cut pushed or carried forward, as opposed to the more common ‘drawing-cut’ pulled or drawn backwards toward the swordsman's body. The strong curve of the Hussar saber makes thrusting with the point difficult (it must be hooked). But as described by Lonnergan, the thrust is effective because it is made with the first inch or so with the edge which cuts through soft tissue. This is probably best effected on horseback at speed. I have tested this cut afoot via simple extension as well as via a powerful lunge, and found that it does not appear to be as effective as Lonnergan describes. (I used a Cold Steel scimitar on a variety of test subject materials, ranging from a large beef brisket to bound straw to large banana trees being cut back for the winter.) However, the kinetic energy of a rider attacking at the hand-gallop would almost certainly make the sawing cut as effective as Lonnergan describes, cutting through clothing and flesh.

This is different from what Hollywood and swashbuckling novels have accustomed us to see: that is, large sweeping head- and limb-lopping cuts. A sawing cut, if less flashy, was probably more effective and, importantly, more difficult to recognize and defeat.

■
HUNGARIAN HUSSAR COLONEL CIRCA 1700. FROM *NEU-ERÖFFNETE WELT-GALLERIA* (NUREMBERG: 1703). DEDICATION BY ABRAHAM A SANCTA CLARA, ENGRAVINGS BY CHRISTOPH WEIGEL AFTER CASPAR LUYKEN.

Regarding defense in Hussar swordplay, Lonnergan writes that, “If you strike at them as you meet them, they will avoid your blow, by stooping forward, leaning backward, or even by throwing themselves to the opposite sides of their horses, and will recover their saddles again.” Mounted *esquive*!

Lonnergan recommends cutting at Hussar sword arms because “it is naturally in a St. George [modern saber quinte, more or less]to save their heads.

To thrust at a Hussar, he recommends “a Segonde [seconde] darted forwards, for so the height of your horses, superior to theirs, will have it, and afford you greater power over them in a close attack, which they must avoid as much as possible.”

When fencing on horseback Hussar-to-Hussar, Lonnergan notes that “their best method is to parry any cut made at them with a Quarte, Tierce, or Prime, and repost with a Sawing-Cut, and thrust, and recover with a Drawing-cut.”

Most notably, he writes that the “bent [curve] of their swords will afford them an unavoidable Quarte-over-the-arm, or a Cavé [sic: the accent grave is used incorrectly on *cavé* in the original text].”

In other words, the Hussar saber with its curved blade has a natural *cavé* or angulation against quart, tierce, or prime parries (or any other parries, in fact). I’ve heard some historical fencers note that this is an advantage the curved saber has, but I must note here that *Lonnergan is referring to actions on horseback with horses moving at speed! The rider, executing the natural angulation with the saber, can escape the riposte as he rides by, while simultaneously cutting or thrusting with cavé (the thrust described is actually a cut). This is not the case afoot: fencer A attacks with an inside cut, fencer B parries quarte and ripostes covered, fencer A makes a cavé around the quarte riposte—and receives his adversary’s riposte cut, having failed to protect himself against it. In other words, use this cavé afoot at your own peril. Fencing, after all, is supposed to be about hitting and not getting hit.*



HUSSAR, 1812. (BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE.)

A cut not mentioned by Lonnergan, and in fact one in which I’ve only ever seen in Hollywood films, is the low sweeping cut forward on horseback. Often in movies you see knights and so forth lopping off heads this way. However, we probably don’t see it in fencing texts or descriptions of mounted combat for a reason: it would be easily parried by an enemy on foot if were armed with sword, pike, halberd, or musket, and the parry might even dismount the attacking rider.

It would be similarly dangerous against a mounted adversary, leaving the attacker exposed in the high lines unless protected by head and body armor of some sort. Further, the cut might easily be stopped by the enemy’s mount, again with the possibility of disarmament. Hollywood typically does things for show, for drama, not necessarily for historical authenticity.

The closest I’ve seen in reality to this Hollywood low cut is a low thrust made with a straight sword (broad or back) against a mounted adversary, the hand held at the level of the rider’s hip and the point aimed at the enemy’s lower abdomen. The mounted attacker typically has breast and back, and probably a skull cap under his hat, and the thrust is intended for the lower abdomen just under the enemy’s armor.



DETAIL OF A HUNGARIAN HUSSAR DATED 1850 FROM “HUSSARDS HONGROIS = UNGARISCHE HUSSAREN” IN THE BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE.

Lonnergan’s advice for light horsemen being pursued by larger numbers of horsemen is swashbuckling at its best: “Otherwise you may, like the Prussian or Hungarian Hussars, fire under your arm backward, or over our shoulder, and kill at random when flying and closely pursued.”

Firing pistols over one’s shoulder or under one’s arm while fleeing at the gallop? Swashbuckling indeed! And it’s clearly a technique clearly used long before the Hollywood cowboys I grew up watching did so on television and in film, inspired perhaps by a famous Frederic Remington painting.



FREDERIC REMINGTON, *A DASH FOR THE TIMBER*, CIRCA 1889. DETAILS [HERE](#).

Although this has been an incomplete description of Hussar swordplay, hopefully it has dashed a few Hollywood myths, and also demonstrated that the study of swordplay—inevitably lifelong if you really intend to grasp it—is as fascinating as any other subject, if not more so.



A HUSSAR CHASED BY DEATH, OR, AS ONE OF MY BUD/S (BASIC UNDERWATER DEMOLITION/SEAL TRAINING) INSTRUCTORS, A VIETNAM VETERAN, MIGHT HAVE PUT IT, THE JOY OF CHEATING DEATH—UNTIL THE ONE TIME YOU DON’T, OF COURSE. HENDRICK HONDIUS (I), AFTER SEBASTIAAN VRANCX, 1644 . RIJKSMUSEUM.

Coming soon: knife-fighting Dutch seamen, the *fusil boucanier*, rules of fencing etiquette (or at least what they should be), model ships and towns from Hollywood swashbucklers, a technical post on the arm extension in the fencing lunge past and present, and more. And eventually: the duel on the shore!

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Jack Sparrow, Perhaps? The Origin of an Early “Hollywood” Pirate, Plus the Authentic Image of a Real Buccaneer

JANUARY 23, 2018 7:10 PM / 3 COMMENTS



THE SMALL CAPTION READS “COVER DRAWN AND ENGRAVED ON WOOD BY HOWARD MCCORMICK.” AUTHOR’S COLLECTION.

The illustration above was created in late 1926 or early 1927, and published in April of the latter year. Among its several pirate clichés (skull and bones on the hat, tattoos, curved dagger, long threatening mustache) is one I had thought was entirely modern: a pirate hair braid with coins attached.

Quite possibly, this coin braid is the artist’s idea of a pirate “love lock.” The love lock was popular among some young English and French gentlemen in the first half of the seventeenth century. Usually worn on the left side, it was typically tied with a ribbon, a “silken twist” as one author called it. Occasionally two were worn, one on each side as in the image below.



HENRI DE LORRAINE, COUNT OF HARCOURT (1601-1666), KNOWN AS “LE CADET LA PERLE” DUE TO HIS BRAVERY IN BATTLE. HE IS ALSO SPORTING A PAIR OF LOVE LOCKS. PRINT BY NICOLAS DE LARMESSIN, 1663. BRITISH MUSEUM.

This “pirate love lock” is a noteworthy characteristic of the very Hollywood, very fantasy pirate Captain Jack Sparrow, and I wonder if this image did not inspire much of his look. Historically-speaking, though, there is no historical basis for it among pirates of the “Golden Age” (circa 1655 to 1725), although it’s possible there may have been a gentleman rover or two who wore one during the first half of the seventeenth century—but not a braid or lock with coins.

Of course, much of *The Mentor* pirate image above was clearly inspired by famous illustrator and author Howard Pyle, as shown below.



ROMANTIC, LARGELY IMAGINED PAINTING OF A BUCCANEER. FROM “THE FATE OF A TREASURE-TOWN” IN *HARPER’S MONTHLY MAGAZINE*, DECEMBER 1905. THE IMAGE IS REPRINTED IN *HOWARD PYLE’S BOOK OF PIRATES*.



“HOW THE BUCCANEERS KEPT CHRISTMAS,” HOWARD PYLE, *HARPER’S WEEKLY*, DECEMBER 16, 1899, A SPECIAL TWO-PAGE IMAGE. I’VE DISCUSSED THIS IMAGE IN [OF BUCCANEER CHRISTMAS, DOG AS DINNER, & CIGAR SMOKING WOMEN](#).



A CLASSIC HOWARD PYLE LINE DRAWING, FROM *HOWARD PYLE’S BOOK OF PIRATES*.

There’s a hint of N. C. Wyeth too, not surprising given that he was a student of Howard Pyle. However, Captain Peter Blood was a gentleman pirate, and the pirate on *The Mentor* cover is clearly not.



BATTERED DUST JACKET FROM THE PHOTOPLAY EDITION OF *CAPTAIN BLOOD: HIS ODYSSEY* BY RAFAEL SABATINI, 1922. THE COVER ART AND IDENTICAL FRONTISPIECE ARTWORK BY N. C. WYETH.

And Wyeth’s *Captain Blood* cover is clearly influenced by this 1921 cover he painted for *Life* magazine. In fact, less the goatee, the two buccaneers might be one and the same:



DETAILS ABOUT THE PAINTING CAN BE FOUND AT THE [BRANDYWINE RIVER MUSEUM OF ART](#). ODDLY, THE *LIFE* MAGAZINE ISSUE HAS NO STORY OR ARTICLE ABOUT BUCCANEERS OR PIRATES.



“THE PIRATE” BY N. C. WYETH. PRETTY MUCH THE SAME PIRATE AS IMMEDIATELY ABOVE, LESS THE FICTIONAL “PIRATE BOOTS,” THIS TIME PAINTED FOR HAL HASKELL SR., A DUPONT EXECUTIVE WHO COMMISSIONED IT IN 1929. FOR YEARS THE PAINTING HUNG IN HASKEL’S YACHT, AND AFTERWARD TO THE PRESENT IN THE FAMILY HOME. THE PRINT IS AVAILABLE FROM [THE BUSACCA GALLERY](#), [ART-CADE GALLERY](#), AND OTHER VENDORS.

The Pyle influence continued through the twentieth century in film, illustration, and mass market paperbacks about pirates...



“PIRATE DREAMING OF HOME” BY NORMAN ROCKWELL, 1924. THE PAINTING IS ALSO CLEARLY BASED ON HOWARD PYLE’S FAMOUS PAINTING, “[THE BUCCANEER WAS A PICTURESQUE FELLOW](#),” AND MAY BE INTENDED TO REPRESENT THE SAME BUCCANEER LATER IN LIFE, OR PERHAPS IS SIMPLY AN HOMAGE TO PYLE. (NORMAN ROCKWELL MUSEUM.)

The Mentor illustration is also clearly influenced by Douglas Fairbanks’s 1926 film *The Black Pirate*, which was, according to Fairbanks himself, heavily influenced by *Howard Pyle’s Book of Pirates* and to a fair degree by *Peter Pan*.

Seriously, check out Fairbanks’s costume in the film, it’s obviously that of Peter Pan grown up. I have a soft spot for Douglas Fairbanks: my first fencing master, Dr. Francis Zold,

described him as a gentleman and a swordsman, and described how Fairbanks invited the Hungarian fencers to his mansion Picfair (named after Fairbanks and his wife, Mary Pickford) after György Jekelfalussy-Piller won the gold saber medal at the 1932 Los Angeles Olympic Games.



ANDERS RANDOLF AS THE PIRATE CAPTAIN IN *THE BLACK PIRATE*. NOTE THE SKULL AND BONES ON THE HAT, THE DAGGER IN THE MOUTH, THE HOOP EARRING, AND, JUST VISIBLE, THE TATTOO ON THE CHEST. SCREEN CAPTURE FROM THE KINO BLU-RAY. A USEFUL REVIEW OF THE FILM IS AVAILABLE [HERE](#).



PUBLICITY STILL, POSSIBLY A FRAME ENLARGEMENT FROM B&W FOOTAGE GIVEN THE GRAIN, OF THE ADMIRABLE DUEL ON THE BEACH BETWEEN RANDALF AND FAIRBANKS, CHOREOGRAPHED BY FRED CAVENS. MORE ON THIS IN A LATER BLOG POST. AUTHOR'S COLLECTION.

And here, finally, we have Johnny Depp as Jack Sparrow in the flesh, braids and such dangling from his hair, again for which there is no historical precedent among Golden Age pirates that we know of. It's hard to see how Depp's costume, in particular his hair, might not have been influenced by the illustration at the top of the page. If it weren't, it's quite a coincidence.



"CAPTAIN JACK SPARROW MAKES PORT" FROM THE [JACK SPARROW GALLERY](#) ON THE *DISNEY PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN* WEBSITE.



JACK SPARROW AGAIN, WITH A CLOSER LOOK AT HIS BRAIDS &C. FROM THE [JACK SPARROW GALLERY](#) ON THE *DISNEY PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN* WEBSITE.

As noted, it's entirely possible that the *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* costume designers never saw the image at the top of the page. They may have imagined it themselves, or been influenced by something else. A very likely possibility is Donald O'Connor in the 1951 film *Double Crossbones*, a campy pirate comedy that makes fun of nearly all pirate clichés.



DONALD O'CONNOR IN *DOUBLE CROSSBONES*. NOTE THE BRAID OVER HIS RIGHT EAR. (SCREEN CAPTURE.)

Although this may seem to be little more than coincidence, there are other similarities between the two films, strongly suggesting the writers and costume designers were familiar with it. In particular, O'Connor plays a shy, somewhat bumbling shopkeeper's apprentice in love with the governor's beautiful ward, and she with him. Due to difference in social class he's unwilling to express his love openly until by accident he becomes a pirate. Sound familiar? Even the costumes of the governor's ward (Lady Sylvia Copeland, played by Helena Carter) are similar (homage-fashion?) to those of Elizabeth Swann, played by Keira Knightley. If not the *Pirates of the Caribbean* costume designer, then perhaps the *Double Crossbones* costume designer was familiar with the image at the top of the page.



SCREEN CAPTURES FROM *DOUBLE CROSSBONES*, 1951. PLENTY OF CANDLESTICKS, NOT TO MENTION A PAINTED MINIATURE AROUND THE NECK INSTEAD OF A MAGICAL AZTEC COIN.

Of course, all this so far is "Hollywood," for lack of a better term. There are a number of serious groups of reenactors, scholars, and others trying to correct the false historical image, all with varying degrees of accuracy, agreement and disagreement, and success.

Hollywood has yet to get aboard, no matter whether in pirate films and television series, or often any film or television set prior to the nineteenth century for that matter, probably because it's easier to play to audience expectations (and, unfortunately, much of the audience doesn't really care), not to mention that there's a tendency or even a fad among costume designers to do something that "evokes" the image or era rather than depict it accurately, not to mention the time and other expense of researching, designing, and creating costumes from scratch when there are costumes "close enough," so to speak, already in film wardrobes.

Here's a hint, Hollywood: you can start by getting rid of the "pirate boots." They didn't exist. They're actually based on riding boots, and a pirate would only be in riding boots if he were on a horse—and horses aren't often ridden aboard ship. Further, you can get rid of the baldrics in most cases, exceptions being primarily for gentlemen pirates wearing smallswords into the 1680s, no later. (You can have some Spanish pirates with rapiers wear baldrics after this, though.) And for that matter, you can get rid of wide belts and large belt buckles too. But if nothing else, please, please get rid of the boots, which, if I recall correctly, a UK journalist once correctly described as nothing more than fetish-wear.

Full disclosure: I was the historical consultant to *Black Sails*, a great show with a great cast and crew, but I had nothing to do with the costuming, much of which is considered as near-blasphemy by advocates of historical accuracy in material culture in television and film. That said, the show is a fictional prequel to a work of fiction that variously created or expanded some of our biggest myths about pirates—buried treasure, the black spot, and so on. Looked at this way, if you can accept the story you can probably tolerate the costuming.

I've discussed what real pirates and buccaneers looked like several times, not without some occasional minor quibbling by other authorities. *The Golden Age of Piracy* has some details, as do two or three of my other books, but several of my blog posts also discuss some of the more egregious clichés, with more posts on the subject to come.

At any rate, here's an image of a real buccaneer, a French *flibustier* in fact, from the 1680s. It's an eyewitness image, one of only a handful of authentic eyewitness images of "Golden Age" sea rovers. It and the others prove that an image may evoke swashbuckling pirates while still being entirely accurate.

ONE OF SEVERAL EYEWITNESS IMAGES OF FRENCH *FLIBUSTIERS* (BUCCANEERS) IN THE 1680S. THESE ARE THE ONLY KNOWN EYEWITNESS IMAGES OF GOLDEN AGE SEA ROVERS. THEY WENT LARGELY UNNOTICED AND WITHOUT COMMENTARY UNTIL I RAN ACROSS THEM BY ACCIDENT WHILE RESEARCHING LATE 17TH CENTURY CHARTS OF FRENCH CARIBBEAN PORTS. I'VE DISCUSSED THEM IN AN ARTICLE FOR THE *MARINER'S MIRROR*, AND ALSO IN THESE TWO POSTS: [THE AUTHENTIC IMAGE OF THE REAL BUCCANEERS OF CAPTAIN BLOOD: HIS ODYSSEY BY RAFAEL SABATINI](#) AND [THE AUTHENTIC IMAGE OF THE BOUCANIER](#). THE POSTS INCLUDE CITATIONS TO THE ORIGINAL IMAGES.

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