

First Name Last Name

Professor

English

Date

To what extent did “Mensur” affect student life in fencing fraternities in Germany in the 20th Century?

Plan of Investigation

The investigation assesses how the “Mensur” affect the student life in fencing fraternities in Germany in the 20th century. In order to evaluate the Mensur effect on the student life in Germany, I pondered into a great deal of literature concerning the given theme.

Having read different books about Germany of 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, I paid attention to the mentioning of Heidelberg and the scars obtained in it as an indicator of courage of a hero. There was one of the oldest universities in Heidelberg famous for its duel traditions. In order to be objective, it is necessary to note that Heidelberg was not the only place where the students constantly fought among themselves. Duels took place in all German universities, however, with different frequency. According to the German legislation, each student, irrespective of a social status, should appear in public places with a sword. He could be penalized for the violation of this rule. Besides, the German students were always famous for cockiness and corporationism.

Summary of Evidence

Each student belonged to any corporation. The corporations were divided according to the grace and shine: the sons of rich parents belonged to one of the brilliant corporations as this pleasure cost eight thousand Deutsche Marks a year. The most well-known corporations were called “Burshenschaft” and “Landsmanshaft”. The main goal was maintained: the universities was subdivided approximately into twelve separate corporations from which

everyone should have strictly certain colors of a banner and caps - and also strictly certain, favorite beerhouse where the members of other corporations were not allowed.

The student's brotherhoods of Germany, without speaking about their advantages, were guilty that they did not open the danger of such development to people's life. There was no mutual understanding between the students and young workers; together with the other layers of youth, senior generations simply ignored the debates with the youth.

Student's communities - brotherhoods and unions - had to realize their specific tasks. Thus, they could justify own existence. The pre-war brotherhood with feudal principles was not effective any more. Belonging to a student's brotherhood or union, each student had to find the new forms and define the student's life with the observance of the strictest discipline and soldier's asceticism.

Therefore, the students had to participate in updating of scholastic university community actively. The student's brotherhood of new type was, first of all, the center of life of new student's community.

German student's brotherhoods (akademische Verbindungen, Burschenschaften) looked like clubs. In some communities wine parties were the main occupation, in some - different duels and vestments in different clothes, in some - recitation and a continence of speeches. The activity of brotherhoods was surrounded with various rituals and traditions, from the ritual of initiation and duels up to the singing of drinking songs.

The students of those times were in exclusive situation just owing to the training. They had to serve in army for only one year. They possessed the specific academic rights and positions. The students' brotherhoods were guided by the principles established during the era of feudalism, and even in the conditions of the classical liberalism they kept the tradition to develop talents. As this ideal was widely adopted, superficial and unilateral began to

progress. Training became more and more insignificant, constructed on the empty forms and social conditions.

The Germans called such a duel “Mensur”, from the Latin word meaning “measure”.

Mensur was a duel with a ban to recede and evade. All blows were allowed only to a head. It was organized between the members of the student’s brotherhoods in Germany for the only purpose: to get honorable scars on a face and hands.

Mensur was carried out almost only on the sharpened rapiers. Thus, all vital places on a body were closed by bandages. Everything, even a sidelong glance could serve a reason for such duels. In some cases it was the requirement of the brotherhoods to organize a duel once a semester.

According to the Mensur rules, the duelists should not have killed each other; they were obliged to show only firmness in fight. Thus, the protective equipment initially was a protective bandage on the right hand, however, after a moving and evasion ban from blows a special suit covering the whole body, leaving open only a head started to be used.

There could be several duels a week; each student could take part in a dozen of duels each year. However, there was another type of Mensur to which the audience was not allowed: it happened between the student who dishonored himself by the slightest movement during a duel with his companion and the best fighter of all corporations; the latter put a number of bloody wounds to the guilty. Only after that, having proved the ability to accept punishment and not to stir, the student was considered to be washed up from a shame and worthy to remain among the companions.

Evaluation of Sources

The student life of the 20th century in Germany is presented in the literature work of Jerome K. Jerome. His observations of the German character and stereotypes were very

interesting from the social-historical point of view. His observations are ironic and penetrated with the mutual sympathy.

Thus, the portrait of a student was the following: he was not an athlete. Sometimes he could play football, more often rode a bicycle, more often - was fond of the French billiards at stuffy restaurants. In most cases he spent his free time on drinking beer and duels. The Germans called such students "Bummels".

"The chief work of these student companies is to fight among themselves, or with some rival Korps or Schaft, the celebrated German Mensur. The Mensur has been described so often and so thoroughly that I do not intend to bore my readers with any detailed account of it. I merely come forward as an impressionist, and I write purposely the impression of my first Mensur, because I believe that first impressions are more true and useful than opinions blunted by intercourse, or shaped by influence" (Jerome: 2002).

According to Kalei (2009), "participation in the German Mensur, aside from its other positive social qualities, confers a greater sense of respect in the individual for the larger society, with all the incumbent responsibilities and obligations requisite therein".

Speaking of the theory of satisfaction of Andrew Mills, (2011), it should be said that he found out that the German students searched for the obtaining of satisfaction by means Mensur:

"When an individual demands *Satisfaktion* from a fellow honor-bound male by whom he perceives himself to have been offended, the insulted party is demanding redress by means of a public retraction of the insult in a manner he deems acceptable" (Mills: 2011).

Analysis

A well-known Mensur developed the habit to atrocity. It demanded dexterity; there was an impression of something unpleasant and ridiculous, as from fight at show theaters. In aristocratic Bonn where there were a lot of foreigners, duels occurred in more sustained style:

in good rooms, in the presence of gray-haired doctors who assisted wounded, meanwhile, footmen enclose public with entertainments; thus, everything received a type of a picturesque ceremony. However, the students were limited to the most important and not so attractive duels in least known universities.

The participants of Mensur did not do any attempts to avoid blows: the aspiration of each student consisted in obtaining more scars on a face after the graduation from the university. The winner was a person, having more wounds and scars. He could feel the delights of his companions, envy of youths and worship of girls. He could walk with a pride for the first month after Mensur, without being confused that almost lost a human look.



Pic. 1. A German student after Mansur.

Wide, gaping wounds were the most desired; they were purposely sutured up somehow for the scar to remain for the whole life. A happy owner of a thorough disgrace can safely expect to get the loving bride - with a dowry which was expressed in at least five-digit figure.

Conclusion

It is possible to say much in favor of a serious duel; however, there are no advantages in Mensur. It was an empty childishness, despite all the cruelty of game. Cruelty does not give gravity. After all, the wounds have own price - not by its severity, but by its inner

meaning, by the circumstances improving them. It seems to me, the German students would achieve the desired results simply teasing wild cats. It was not necessary to be registered as a clubman only to cut a face to pieces.

The travelers tell about the African savages who show the delight by cutting themselves; however, the Europeans have no need to follow such example. Mensur personifies only a ridiculous side of a duel, and if Germans did not see that it was strange to be fond of such activity, they need only to be mocked.

In conclusion, I would like to say that Mensur, being a students' "entertainment", had a great influence on the duel codes of the adjacent states: Austro-Hungary, Russia, France as a great number of the natives of other countries studied in Germany.

Works Cited

- Breuer, K. Competing Masculinities: Fraternities, Gender and Nationality in the German Confederation, 1815–30. *Gender & History*, Volume 20, Issue 2, Pages 270-287, August 2008.
- Jerome K. Jerome. "Three Men on the Bummel". Chapter 13. 2002. Serenity Publishers.
- Halsall, H. *Degenerate Germany*. 1991. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, California.
- Kalei, K. "A Student of the Sword". 2009. Authorsden.com.
- Men of Honour: A Social and Cultural History of the Duel*. Trans. Anthony Williams. Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1995.
- Magee, R. "Duels, Doctors and Death". *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Surgery*. Volume 70, Issue 8, pages 616-620, August 2000.
- Mills., A. "*Satisfaktion* in Nineteenth-Century German Dueling Violence and Its Relevance for Literary Analysis, *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory*, 2011, 86:2, 134-152.
- Wisely, Andrew. *Arthur Schnitzler and the Discourse of Honor and Dueling*. New York: Peter Lang, 1996.