

## In Defense of Peter von Danzig

by Christian Henry Tobler

Shelf and catalogue numbers are tools of librarians and academics the world over. Any scholarly citation for historic work must include these designations, assigned to the various elements of an institution's collection. Musicologists, in their turn, often discuss Beethoven's works using their opus number or Mozart's compositions by their Köchel catalogue listing. It is however in the nature of human beings to give things a name, even if they were not gifted with one by their creator.

Mozart's final symphony, No. 41 in C Major (K. 551), is popularly known today as the "Jupiter Symphony" and Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 14 in C (Op. 27, No. 2) is beloved as the "Moonlight Sonata". Mozart's symphony received its nickname from the German impresario Johann Peter Salomon. Beethoven's sonata was given its popular name by a critic, Ludwig Rellstab, who felt it evocative of a moonlit night on Lake Lucerne. What the composers would have thought of these names cannot be known – Beethoven was dead by the time the "Moonlight" nickname had been coined; Mozart likely had died before his final symphony saw its first performance. In the former's case, we can be relatively sure that Master Ludwig would've scoffed at the notion: the No. 14 was hardly his favorite (he was irritated at its popularity) and only the first movement can be posited as conjuring up a moonlit night.

The road leading to the naming of a work is often torturous and strange. The same is true for surviving medieval manuscripts, including those on the fighting arts. Few of these works were named at the time of their creation, yet we find ourselves talking about them using names like the "Gladiatoria", "Goliath", or "Jud Lew" Fechtbuch. This is understandable, given our only other recourse is to refer to them as "MS. germ. quart. 16", "MS. germ. quart. 2020", and "Cod.I.6.4°.3", respectively – designations neither easily remembered nor suited to casual discourse.

At what point do such nicknames become misleading? This is a question I have struggled with, and continue to do so. Briefly revisiting the concert hall, the name "Moonlight Sonata" *arguably* misleads the potential Beethoven audient, setting expectations of romance, contemplation, or tranquility that are quickly dispelled by the sonata's more cheerful second movement and tempestuous finale. For the historic combat student, the name "Jud Lew Fechtbuch" is also misleading, for it implies that Master Lew the Jew is the author of the work, which is in actuality a compendium of various writings, by various authors, like so many such fight books. Unfortunately, there really aren't any particularly satisfying alternative names for this work, so its retention of its moniker is all but as assured as the Moonlight Sonata's.

My recent title, [\*\*\*In Saint George's Name\*\*\*](#), features a translation of one of those imperfectly named compendia: Codex 44 A 8, held in the Library of the National Academy in Rome,

and better known as the “Von Danzig Fechtbuch.” This manuscript is arguably one of the most important documents of the Liechtenauer fighting tradition. The Fechtbuch contains a body of important, and anonymous, commentaries on Liechtenauer’s verses, as well as adjunct works attributed to other important masters: Ott the Jew, Andres Lignitzer, Martin Huntfeltz, and...Peter von Danzig zu Ingolstadt. Von Danzig is the author of the manuscript’s final section, a gloss, differing from the anonymous commentaries, of Liechtenauer’s verse for armoured combat on foot – that is, *Harnischfechten*.

Given his authorship of but a single (and relatively small) chapter in such a large compendium, the association of the overall manuscript with von Danzig’s name might seem strange.

Dr. Jeffrey Forgeng, curator at the Higgins Armory Museum and author of several books on historic fighting arts, has proposed, and refers to 44 A 8 by, a different name: the Starhemberg Fechtbuch. Erasmus Herr von Starhemberg, was an Austrian noble who owned the codex in the 16th century; this is attested by some cataloging text added at a later date at the beginning of the manuscript.

Starhemberg is not, however, the only name appearing in the latter day cataloging that appears in the manuscript’s first few pages. The name Theo Wittigschlager is also there, in 16th century script, beneath the date 1554. Another line, written in Italian, states that the manuscript is “also known as Codex Bombarini.” Still further on, we find, also in Italian:

*The present codex was written in 1452 and was in the possession of Lord Erasmus von Starhemberg in 1568; in 1813 it came to the Biblioteca Corsiniana as a donation from Your Highness, the Princess D. Antonia Corsini.*

The most logical name to use, therefore, from the catalogue data, would be “Codex Bombarini”, as that’s a name the codex was known by at some point. In fact, it’s the only documentable name it’s ever had. And yet, let’s face it – there’s something unappealing about calling a quintessentially German Fechtbuch by an Italian curatorial name!

But let’s return to Master Peter von Danzig. In continuing to name this codex after him, are we creating another spuriously named “Jupiter Symphony”, or another reflection of moonlight on Lake Lucerne? Or is there some justification for calling this work the *Von Danzig Fechtbuch*?

To my mind, the answer is: yes, and for several reasons.

The manuscript is unique in being the *only* compendium (at least discovered thus far) that includes Master Peter's armoured combat commentary; the works of the other masters occur in numerous other sources. And it is a unique commentary, notable for its focus on tactics, its unique view of the material. It also contains some specifics unseen elsewhere, such as this advice on how to grip the spear:

*It is to be known that the pulling is done thus: take your spear in both hands as with the half-sword, so that the thumbs stand toward each other. And when you want to pull, then pull the spear back with your right hand, and with a light touch let your spear go in the left hand.*

Finally, there may be further significance to his commentary comprising the *last* chapter of the codex: he is still alive at the time of its creation. All the other masters appearing in the manuscript – Lignitzer, Ott, Huntfeltz, and certainly Liechtenauer himself – are dead by the year 1452, the date found in the manuscript. We know this because of the memorial accompanying each of their names “God have mercy on him.” With Von Danzig, this memorial is absent, so we may be reasonably sure he still lived. Perhaps he may even have had a hand in the creation of the compilation, contributing his own work after that of those departed? This last must, of course, be speculation.

Peter von Danzig is listed among the *Gesellschaft Liechtenauers* (Society of Liechtenauer), the roster of Liechtenauer tradition masters appearing in Paulus Kal's c. 1470 Fechtbuch, by which time he is deceased. Codex 44 A 8 is the only place where this bona fide master's work, unique among the German works on armoured combat, appears – and he is alive in 1452 during its compilation. This manuscript is his only surviving memorial, and his name is a more worthy title than any cataloging information for a work given no name by its creators.