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THE ADVENTURE OF KENDÔ IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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PART 1: INTRODUCTION:

THE ENCOUNTER WITH KENDO AND ITS QUALIFIED EXPONENTS IN JAPAN CAN PROVIDE A NEW OUTLOOK ON ANY FOREIGNER'S RESPECTIVE CULTURAL BACKGROUND. THUS IT IS IN A SPIRIT OF GRATITUDE THAT AN ATTEMPT AT REASSESSING KENDO'S SIGNIFICANCE FOR MATTERS OF THE PRESENT IS SUBMITTED HERE FROM A VIEWPOINT AS REMOTE AS THE HEIGHTS OF THE SOUTHERN BLACK FOREST IN GERMANY.

IN THE COURSE OF SEVERAL CONVERSATIONS ON THE SUBJECT OF KENDO THE AUTHOR WAS ENCOURAGED BY HIS TEACHER, MR. TORU TAKAHASHI, PROFESSOR OF KENDO AND ANATOMY AT TOKYO UNIVERSITY OF FINE ARTS TO BRING TO PAPER SOME IMPRESSIONS CONCERNING THE POTENTIAL TRADITIONAL KENDO MIGHT HOLD NOT ONLY FOR ENTHUSIASTIC PRACTITIONERS BUT FOR MODERN SOCIETY AS A WHOLE. WRITING AS A FOREIGNER ABOUT ASPECTS OF KENDO, WHICH REACH BEYOND ITS CURRENT STATUS AS A COMPETITIVE SPORT MAY WELL BE CONSIDERED PRESUMPTUOUS. THE SAYING "*ONE WHO SPEAKS OF IT DOES NOT KNOW, AND ONE WHO KNOWS DOES NOT SPEAK OF IT*" INDEED HOLDS TRUE FOR MANY A RELIGIOUS AND PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPT IN EAST AND WEST. ACCORDINGLY A SPIRITUAL DEPTH OF THE MARTIAL ARTS IN GENERAL AND OF KENDO IN PARTICULAR IS CONSTANTLY BEING REFERRED TO IN A QUITE SUPERFICIAL AND AT THE SAME TIME MYSTIFYING MANNER IN MOST PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE ON THE SUBJECT OUTSIDE JAPAN. ON THE OTHER HAND THE WEALTH OF EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE ABOUT FURTHER REACHING BENEFITS OF KENDO INSIDE JAPAN COULD NOT YET COUNTERBALANCE ITS GRADUAL RETROGRESSION TOWARDS A COMMON AFFAIR OF VICTORY AND DEFEAT. THE OUTLOOK ON SOME TRAITS OF TRADITIONAL KENDO FROM AN OUTSIDE PERSPECTIVE THUS MAY RESULT IN THE FOLLOWING: IF KENDO SHOULD BE DEEMED UNIQUE IN A SENSE THAT NO FOREIGNER WILL EVER BE ABLE TO GAIN A BIT OF UNDERSTANDING, THE THOUGHTS RENDERED HERE WILL BE IGNORED AND HAVE NO EFFECT AT ALL. HOWEVER, IF TRADITIONAL KENDO SHOULD BE UNDERSTOOD AS A MEANS OF BENEVOLENT EXCHANGE ALSO ON AN INTERNATIONAL SCALE, IT IS HOPED FOR THAT

THE PRESENT PAPER - DESPITE ALL ITS DEFICIENCIES AND MISINTERPRETATIONS — MIGHT BE ACCEPTED AS A TINY CONTRIBUTION. WHEN A MEANINGFUL SPREADING OF THE JAPANESE WAY OF THE SWORD IS TRULY INTENDED, KENDO'S FURTHER ADAPTION TO MODERN CONCEPTS OF SPORT MEANS TAKING THE EASY WAY OUT. FOR THE SAKE OF PRESERVING AND TRANSMITTING TO FUTURE GENERATIONS SOME CHIVALROUS VALUES OF COEXISTENCE THAT ARE IN A STATE OF DECLINE IN THE WESTERN WORLD AND IN MODERN JAPAN, THIS SHOULD BE AVOIDED.

IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN TAUGHT THAT THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF ANY HISTORICAL RESEARCH IS TO LEARN FROM THE PAST TO ACCURATELY RESPOND TO REQUIREMENTS OF THE PRESENT. CONTRARY TO CURRENTS IN MODERN SOCIETY, WHICH - AS MOST SOCIETIES BEFORE - IS QUITE RESISTANT AGAINST MANY A HISTORICAL LESSON, THE TRADITION OF KENDO IS STILL LARGELY FOUNDED ON THE VIRTUE OF RESPECT. THE LATTER WAS AND IS EXPRESSED BY THE ADHERENCE TO MANNERS AND POLITENESS (REIHÔ/ 礼法) BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER PRACTICE. IT IS MUTUALLY DIRECTED TOWARDS THE RESPECTIVE OPPONENT OR PARTNER (AITE/ 相手), TOWARDS THE TEACHER(S) PRESENT IN THE DÔJÔ (=HALL OF THE WAY/ 道場) AND TOWARDS THE PRECURSORS ON THE WAY OF THE SWORD. CONSEQUENTLY THE JAPANESE TERM FOR "PRACTICE" (KEIKO/ 稽古) ENCOMPASSES THE PRACTICING IN THE SPIRIT OF THE FOREGOING GENERATIONS OF SWORDSMEN. IT IS DUE TO THEIR EFFORTS THAT THE SETS OF TECHNIQUES FOR KILLING AN OPPONENT WITH THE SWORD WERE TRANSFORMED INTO A MARTIAL WAY (BUDÔ/ 武道) TO MUTUALLY POLISH AND DEVELOP ONE'S OWN PERSONALITY AS WELL AS THE OPPONENT'S.

THE CIRCUMSTANCE THAT TERMS LIKE HONOUR, SELF-DISCIPLINE AND RESPECT HAVE BEEN ABUSED AND PERVERTED DURING THE DARKEST YEARS OF GERMAN AND JAPANESE HISTORY IS SOMETIMES TAKEN TO JUSTIFY THEIR DECREASING OCCURRENCE IN MODERN DAY LANGUAGE. HOWEVER AT THE SAME TIME THERE IS A TENDENCY THAT ALSO LESS AUTHORITATIVE TERMS LIKE COMPASSION, MODESTY AND FAIRNESS SILENTLY TAKE THEIR LEAVE FROM PUBLIC CONSCIOUSNESS. THE ABOVE ARE ONLY SIX OF THE FUNDAMENTAL VALUES MAKING LIFE EASIER IN ANY COMMUNITY THAT CONSIDERS ITSELF CIVILIZED. BUT WHERE IS THE CONNECTION BETWEEN SIX VANISHING VIRTUES AND A KENDO THAT REACHES BEYOND THE SCORING OF POINTS? IT MIGHT BE PUT THAT WAY:

WITHOUT A SENSE OF HONOUR, THERE CAN BE NO COMPASSION.

WITHOUT SELF-DISCIPLINE, THERE CAN BE NO MODESTY.

WITHOUT RESPECT, THERE CAN BE NO FAIRNESS.

THIS APPLIES TO KENDO AS WELL AS TO DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF LIFE RANGING FROM FAMILY-LIFE TO THE ARTS, MODERN SCIENCE, ECONOMICS, POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL CONFLICTS. KENDO AS A MARTIAL WAY UNITES A VARIETY OF TRAITS AND VIRTUES THAT APPEAR CONTRADICTORY TO THE WESTERN MIND. HOWEVER, WHAT APPEAR TO BE CONTRADICTIONS CAN BE OVERCOME BY SERIOUS PRACTICE. THUS IN KENDO - UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF A QUALIFIED TEACHER - THE MEANING OF FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES IN LIFE CAN BE EXPERIENCED PHYSICALLY. IN TURN THIS LEADS TO A MUCH MORE COMPREHENSIVE KIND OF UNDERSTANDING THAN WHAT COULD BE ACHIEVED BY SOLELY INTELLECTUAL OR SOLELY PHYSICAL EFFORTS. FIRST YOU CHALLENGE YOURSELF WHOLEHEARTEDLY, THEN YOU CHALLENGE YOUR OPPONENT. IS IT NOT AN EXCITING PROSPECT THAT A WAY OF THE SWORD TRANSMITTED OVER CENTURIES IN JAPAN CAN CHALLENGE AND ENHANCE MODERN CONCEPTS OF LEARNING, UNDERSTANDING AND TEACHING THROUGHOUT THE WORLD? THE MAIN OBSTACLE FOR ETHICAL PROGRESS WAS DESCRIBED PRECISELY IN A WORK BY LEO PERUTZ FROM 1923:

„NOW THEY WANT TO ABOLISH WAR“, HE CONTINUED AFTER A WHILE. ”WAR THEY WANT TO ABOLISH! WHAT IS THAT GOOD FOR? THIS HERE” – HE POINTED TO THE REVOLVER WITH A MOVEMENT OF THE INDEX – “THEY WANT TO BANISH FROM THE WORLD AND ALL OTHER MEANS OF THE SAME KIND. WHAT IS THAT GOOD FOR? HUMAN PERFDY REMAINS, AND THAT IS THE MOST HOMICIDAL OF ALL MURDEROUS WEAPONS.”
(FROM: “MASTER OF THE DAY OF JUDGEMENT” BY LEO PERUTZ, MUNICH 1923, CITED AND TRANSLATED FROM DTV PUBLISHING, 4TH ED. 2007, P. 57)

WHAT COULD THE SPREADING OF KENDO CONTRIBUTE TO COPE WITH THIS OBSTACLE? OF COURSE THERE ARE SEVERAL WAYS TO MAKE A MEANINGFUL KENDO ACCESSIBLE TO PEOPLE OUTSIDE JAPAN. ONE OF THESE COULD BE A RE-EVALUATION OF THE ABOVE-MENTIONED SET OF VALUES THAT ONCE WERE COMMON IDEALS AMONG WARRIOR-POETS E.G. IN JAPAN, CHINA, INDIA, PERSIA AND EUROPE REGARDLESS OF THEIR RELIGION. TODAY THIS SET MIGHT INDEED SERVE AS A BASIC CODE OF MANNERS AIMED AT THE TARGET OF PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE AND EXCHANGE IN A SPIRIT OF MUTUAL RESPECT. ELABORATE PHILOSOPHICAL AND RELIGIOUS APPROACHES COULD NOT YET EVEN GET CLOSE TO THIS GOAL OVER THE COURSE OF THE LAST 2500 YEARS. THROUGHOUT HISTORY PHILOSOPHICAL, RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL CONCEPTS TEND TO END UP AS PRETEXTS FOR LARGE-SCALE AGGRESSION. IN CONSEQUENCE, WHY NOT ONCE TRY IT THE OTHER WAY ROUND AND EVALUATE THE RELEVANCE OF A MARTIAL WAY, WHICH HAS ITS ROOTS IN AGGRESSION AND WAS TURNED INTO A WAY OF

BENEVOLENT MUTUAL ENRICHMENT BY SOME EXTRAORDINARY EXPONENTS? THIS IS WHERE THE ADVENTURE OF THE WAY OF THE SWORD IN THE 21ST CENTURY BEGINS.

PART 2: ENHANCING SCIENCE BY CONSIDERING PRINCIPLES OF THE SWORD – (1: BASIC THOUGHTS)

KENDO'S POTENTIAL FOR MATTERS OF THE PRESENT IS NOT CONFINED TO THE TRANSMISSION OF EDUCATIONAL VALUES WITHIN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY OR TO THE SPREADING OF ANOTHER COMPETITIVE SPORT. AS A UNIQUE CULTURAL ASSET IT HOLDS MANIFOLD PROSPECTS FOR SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH IN AND OUTSIDE OF JAPAN ALSO. A VARIETY OF PRINCIPLES VALID IN KENDO CAN PROVIDE THE BASIS FOR DEVELOPING A COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM FOR INTERNATIONAL SWORD-RESEARCH TO ANSWER E.G. THE FOLLOWING QUESTION.

WHY IS THE JAPANESE SWORD CONSIDERED SUPERIOR TO ANY OTHER SWORD IN THE WORLD? AMAZINGLY THERE ARE NO DIRECT COMPARISONS AVAILABLE. FURTHERMORE, ARMS LEGISLATION PROHIBITS FOREIGN HISTORICAL SWORDS FROM ENTERING JAPAN, THE ONLY NATION WHERE A PROFOUND KNOWLEDGE ABOUT (INDIGENOUS) EDGED WEAPONS HAS BEEN PRESERVED UNTIL TODAY. VIEWING THIS RESTRICTION, HOW COULD THE TRADITIONAL JAPANESE KNOWLEDGE OF SWORDS AND SWORDSMANSHIP ENHANCE INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH OF THESE HIGH-TECH PRODUCTS OF THE PAST?

REGARDING THE RELATION BETWEEN THE *NIHONTÔ* AND THE *SHINAI* LET US HAVE A LOOK AT TWO COMMON BASICS. THINKING ABOUT THE CRUCIAL IMPORTANCE OF THE CUTTING-ANGLE IN TRADITIONAL *KENJUTSU* AND MODERN *IAIDÔ*, THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE *SHINAI*'S THREAD (*TSURU*) REPRESENTING THE BACK (*MUNE*) OF A REAL SWORD IN KENDÔ BECOMES OBVIOUS. KEEPING THIS IN MIND, THE NECESSITY OF VIEWING THE *SHINAI* AS A *KATANA* AND NOT AS A MERE "BAMBOO-STICK" IS EVIDENT. ANOTHER FUNDAMENTAL ASPECT OF THE SWORD PRESERVED IN MODERN KENDO IS THE ACCURATE APPLICATION OF THE *MONOUCHI* AREA FOR ANY CUTTING-ACTION. *MONOUCHI* AS WELL AS CUTTING-ANGLE ARE TWO NEGLECTED, NONETHELESS ESSENTIAL POINTS FOR THE SCIENTIFIC EVALUATION OF EUROPEAN SWORDS ALSO. THE ABOVE PRINCIPLES AS WELL AS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DISTANCE BETWEEN TWO SWORDSMEN DO NOT ONLY APPLY TO KENDO, BUT TO HISTORICAL CUT-AND-THRUST STYLES OF SWORD-FIGHTING THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

HOWEVER, THESE FUNDAMENTALS OF SWORDSMANSHIP ARE NOT CONSIDERED BY THE MAJORITY OF SCIENTISTS WHO FOCUS ON THE TECHNOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ANCIENT SWORDS IN JAPAN AND IN OTHER CULTURAL SPHERES. AT THE SAME TIME IT CAME AS A SURPRISE THAT EVEN IN JAPAN MANY YOUNG KENDOKA DO NOT EVEN POSSESS A RUDIMENTARY UNDERSTANDING OF THE JAPANESE SWORD,

NOT TO MENTION EUROPEAN SWORDS. AS A MATTER OF FACT, WITH REGARD TO A COMPREHENSIVE UNDERSTANDING OF INTERNATIONAL SWORDS AND SWORDSMANSHIP WE ARE NOT SEEING THE FOREST, BECAUSE WE ARE CONCENTRATING ON SINGLE TREES. THIS CAN BE ILLUSTRATED BY THE DIFFERENT OBJECTIVES OF ARCHAEOLOGY, MATERIALS SCIENCE AND THE TRADITIONAL METHOD OF JAPANESE SWORD-APPRAISAL (*KANTEI*). ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDIES ARE LARGELY LIMITED TO TYPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS, WHILE MODERN MATERIALS SCIENCE CONCENTRATES ON THE MICROSTRUCTURE OF STEEL-TYPES. ONLY THE *KANTEI*-SYSTEM PROVIDES INFORMATION FROM A PRACTICAL VIEWPOINT THAT WAS AVAILABLE TO CRAFTSMEN AND SWORDSMEN OF THE PAST. A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE RESULTS OF *KANTEI*-METHODOLOGY, ARCHAEOLOGY AND MODERN MATERIALS SCIENCE PROVES THE FOLLOWING: THE INDIVIDUALITY OF DIFFERENT SCHOOLS OF SWORD-MAKING APPEARS NEITHER IN A SWORD'S SHAPE, NOR IN ITS MICRO-STRUCTURE, BUT IN ITS POLISHED SURFACE. ACCORDINGLY THE TRADITIONAL JAPANESE WAY OF JUDGING THE QUALITY OF SWORDS BECOMES OF PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE TO ASSESS THE LEVEL OF ANCIENT STEEL-TECHNOLOGY IN DIFFERENT CULTURAL SPHERES.

THE *KANTEI*-SYSTEM ORIGINATED ABOUT 1000 YEARS AGO AND WAS REFINED SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE EDO-PERIOD(1600/1603 – 1867). JUST AS KENDŌ EVOLVED FROM A MATTER OF LIFE OR DEATH TO A WAY OF SHAPING ONES' OWN AND THE OPPONENT'S PERSONALITY, THE APPRAISAL OF THE JAPANESE SWORD DEVELOPED FROM EVALUATING THE SWORD AS A WEAPON TO A SYSTEM OF ITS APPRECIATION AS AN ART-OBJECT. THE KEY TO UNDERSTANDING THE WORLDWIDE REPUTATION OF THE JAPANESE SWORD IS THE SURVIVAL OF THE SWORD-POLISHER'S CRAFT UNTIL THE PRESENT. IF THIS CRAFT HAD NOT SURVIVED, JAPANESE SWORDS WOULD NEITHER DISPLAY SURFACE-TEXTURES NOR TEMPER-LINES, BUT LOOK AS DEPLORABLE AS THE SWORD-BLADES PRESERVED IN WESTERN MUSEUMS: EITHER WITH THE RUST OF CENTURIES ON THEM, OR WITH THE RUST CLUMSILY REMOVED BY ROUGH GRINDING OR ACIDIC TREATMENT. IN FACT THE METHOD OF POLISHING THE JAPANESE SWORD IN COMBINATION WITH THE TRADITIONAL *KANTEI*-SYSTEM REPRESENTS AN INDEPENDENT AND HIGHLY SPECIALIZED PRECURSOR OF MODERN METALLURGY.

REALIZING THIS I DECIDED TO LEARN ABOUT SWORD-POLISHING AND TO HAVE SOME FRAGMENTED EARLY MEDIEVAL EUROPEAN SWORDS POLISHED IN JAPAN. THUS IT COULD BE PROVED FOR THE FIRST TIME ON AN INTERNATIONAL SCALE THAT A VENERABLE JAPANESE APPROACH TO THE APPRECIATION OF ART CAN BE SUPERIOR TO MODERN SCIENTIFIC ANALYSIS. SOME RESULTS OF *KANTEI*-APPLICATION TO WESTERN SWORDS WILL BE INTRODUCED IN THE NEXT ISSUE.

PART 3: ENHANCING SCIENCE BY CONSIDERING PRINCIPLES OF THE SWORD (2: APPLICATION AND SOME RESULTS)

AS WILL BE OBVIOUS FOR ANY DEDICATED KENDOKA, STUDYING THE SWORD WITHOUT CONSIDERING THE PRINCIPLES OF ITS USE IS LIKE STUDYING THE PEN WITHOUT KNOWING HOW TO WRITE. THE SAME ALSO APPLIES THE OTHER WAY ROUND AND MIGHT BE PUT THAT WAY: PURSUING THE PRACTICE OF KENDO WITHOUT ANY KNOWLEDGE OF THE NIHON-TÔ, OF ITS HISTORY AND TECHNOLOGY, PAVES THE WAY FOR SOME GRAVE MISCONCEPTIONS. A SHINING EXAMPLE FOR THE LIFELONG PURSUIT OF SWORD-RESEARCH AND KENDÔ WAS SATÔ KANZAN SENSEI, FOUNDER OF THE JAPANESE SWORD MUSEUM IN YOYOGI, TOKYO, AND KENDÔ SHIHAN AT KOKUGAKUIN UNIVERSITY. IT WAS DUE TO HIS EFFORTS THAT THE JAPANESE SWORD BECAME ACKNOWLEDGED AS A WORK OF ART BY THE U.S. GENERAL HEADQUARTER AFTER THE WAR. THIS LITERALLY SAVED HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF MASTERPIECES FROM DESTRUCTION IN MELTING-FURNACES.

THE PIONEERS OF KENDÔ AS WE KNOW IT TODAY STILL HANDLED REAL SWORDS REGULARLY. IT IS THE MERIT OF NAKAYAMA HAKUDO SENSEI TO HAVE PUBLISHED THE FIRST BOOK ALLOWING FOR A DIRECT INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON OF JAPANESE KENDÔ AND WESTERN SWORDSMANSHIP¹. THE COMMON POINTS AND THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN KENDÔ AND EUROPEAN STYLES OF SWORDSMANSHIP ENCOURAGED ME TO INTRODUCE SOME RESULTS OF PRESENT INTERCULTURAL RESEARCH ON THE SUBJECT OF SWORDS AND SWORDSMANSHIP BETWEEN EUROPE AND JAPAN. AS PREJUDICE CONCERNING EUROPEAN SWORDS AND SWORD-FIGHTING COULD NOT BE ELIMINATED EVEN BY NAKAYAMA SENSEI'S PUBLICATION, I HARDLY DARE HOPE THAT THIS ARTICLE MIGHT CHANGE THIS SITUATION A LITTLE BIT.

THE EUROPEAN SWORDS I BROUGHT TO JAPAN DATED FROM THE 6TH CENTURY A.D., WHICH CORRESPONDS TO THE KOFUN-PERIOD IN JAPAN. TO THE SURPRISE OF THE ART-SWORD-POLISHER SASKI TAKUSHI, MISATO, SAITAMA-KEN, WHO POLISHED THEM, THE SWORDS DISPLAYED THE SAME KINDS OF SURFACE-TEXTURE AS SEEN IN JAPANESE SWORDS. THERE WAS STRAIGHT GRAIN (*MASAME-HADA*), MIXED GRAIN (*ITAME-HADA*) AND BURLWOOD-GRAIN (*MOKUME-HADA*) VISIBLE IN DIFFERENT COMBINATIONS IN THEIR POLISHED SURFACES. THIS FINDING WAS NOT A SURPRISE FOR THE SWORDSMITH AND LIVING NATIONAL TREASURE, AMADA AKITSUGU, NIIGATA-KEN, WHO - IN CONTRAST TO WESTERN AND JAPANESE SCIENTISTS - WAS WELL AWARE THAT ALSO EUROPEAN STEELS COULD NOT HAVE BEEN REFINED OTHERWISE THAN BY REPEATED FOLDING-OVER OF STEEL-BARS. THIS RESULT PROVED THAT THE TRADITIONAL JAPANESE SYSTEM OF SWORD-POLISHING AND APPRAISAL HOLDS IMMENSE POSSIBILITIES FOR THE CATEGORIZATION OF EUROPEAN SWORDS. BY APPLYING THE SUPERIOR JAPANESE METHOD OF POLISHING AND SUBSEQUENT

¹ 中山博道、中山善道：日本剣道と西洋剣技（東京、昭和12年）。

APPRAISAL, THE TRACING OF DIFFERENT SCHOOLS OF WORKMANSHIP BECOMES POSSIBLE ALSO FOR SWORDS THAT COULD UP TO NOW NOT BE DISTINGUISHED BY METHODS OF EUROPEAN ARCHAEOLOGY. IN CONTRAST TO JAPANESE SWORDS THE HITHERTO POLISHED EUROPEAN SWORDS DO NOT SHOW ELABORATE TEMPER-LINES. HOWEVER ACTIVITIES RESULTING FROM THE TEMPERING-PROCESS ARE WELL VISIBLE IN EUROPEAN SWORDS AT LEAST SINCE THE ERA OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE. ONE PREJUDICE CONCERNING EUROPEAN KNIGHTLY SWORDS IS THAT THEY ARE HEAVY AND CLUMSY COMPARED TO JAPANESE SWORDS. THIS NOTION SHOULD BE PUT ASIDE AS A FAIRY-TALE BY NOW. IT IS A FACT THAT MEDIEVAL EUROPEAN SWORDS ARE OFTEN TWICE AS WIDE AS *NIHON-TÔ*, BUT ON THE OTHER HAND THEY ARE ONLY ABOUT HALF AS THICK. THUS THE WEIGHT OF A KNIGHTLY SWORD FOR ONE-HANDED USE RARELY EXCEEDS 1.4 KG. THE TWO-HANDED SWORDS, COMMON FROM THE 14TH TO THE 16TH CENTURY, OFTEN WEIGHED WELL BELOW 1.6 KG. A JAPANESE SWORD FOR TEST-CUTTING OR LAIDÔ-PRACTICE WILL HARDLY EVER EXCEED 1,5 KG. THE KNIGHTLY SWORD-BLADES WERE BALANCED BY POMMELS WHICH SERVED TO KEEP THE BALANCE-POINT CLOSE TO THE GRIP, JUST AS IN MODERN *DOBARI-SHINAI*. ACTUALLY A GOOD EUROPEAN SWORD FEELS AT LEAST AS WELL BALANCED AS A GOOD JAPANESE SWORD. ALTHOUGH EUROPEAN KNIGHTS WERE TRAINED FROM THE AGE OF SEVEN, A SWORD WITH A WEIGHT OF 1,5 KILO IS AT THE LIMIT WHEN AGILITY IS REQUIRED.

AN EXCITING PERSPECTIVE FOR FUTURE SWORD-RESEARCH BETWEEN ASIA AND EUROPE IS THE FACT THAT IN BOTH CULTURAL SPHERES SWORDS HAVE CLOSE MYTHOLOGICAL CONNECTIONS WITH SNAKES/Dragons AND ASTRONOMICAL PHENOMENA. THESE ANALOGIES ARE REPRESENTED BY CLOSELY RELATED MYTHS ABOUT DRAGON-SLAYERS IN SCANDINAVIA (SIEGFRIED SLAYING A DRAGON/SNAKE), EASTERN EUROPE (ST. GEORGE SLAYING A DRAGON AND SAVING A LADY) AND JAPAN (SUSANO-WO-O SLAYING A DRAGON/SNAKE, ALSO SAVING A LADY, BUT PULLING A SWORD OUT OF THE DRAGON'S TAIL). THESE MYTHS APPEAR TO HAVE ORIGINATED WELL BEFORE THE 6TH CENTURY A.D.. THE CONNECTION TO ASTRONOMICAL PHENOMENA BECOMES OBVIOUS BY STAR-SIGNS INLAYED IN EARLY CHINESE AND JAPANESE SWORDS (E.G. THE NATIONAL TREASURE "*SHICHISEI-KEN*"(SEVEN-STAR-SWORD) PRESERVED IN THE UENO NATIONAL MUSEUM, TOKYO) AND BY CRESCENT- OR STAR-SHAPED PUNCHMARKS ON EUROPEAN SWORD-BLADES. AS THE FIRST IRON USED BY MAN WAS METEORITIC, THE NAME FOR IRON IN THE MIDDLE-EAST, WHERE IT WAS UTILIZED FIRST IN THE 4TH MILLENNIUM B.C., WAS "SKY-METAL". THUS IT CAN BE ARGUED THAT THE MYTHOLOGY OF EARLY IRON-METALLURGY SPANS A DISTANCE FROM SCANDINAVIA TO JAPAN. THE STEEL-SWORD ALWAYS REPRESENTED THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF THE IRON-SMITH'S CRAFT NOT ONLY IN JAPAN, BUT ALL OVER THE ANCIENT WORLD. BY PRACTICING KENDÔ WITH THE SHINAI AND AT THE SAME TIME BEING AWARE

OF THE SWORD AS ITS ULTIMATE ORIGIN, WE ARE PART OF AN ANCIENT TRADITION THAT HAS MANAGED TO TRANSCEND ITS VIOLENT ORIGINS NOWHERE, BUT IN JAPAN.

PART 4: ABOUT STRENGTH AND THE HAPPIEST FACE I HAVE EVER SEEN

IN KENDO A SKILFUL PRACTITIONER IS REFERRED TO AS BEING “STRONG”. SWORDSMEN WITH SIGNIFICANTLY MORE INSIGHT AND UNDERSTANDING OF KENDO THAN MYSELF ARE WELL AWARE THAT THE TERM “STRENGTH” IN KENDO HAS AT LEAST THREE DIFFERENT MEANINGS:

TO BEGIN WITH, THERE IS THE STRENGTH OF YOUTH WITH ITS PREDOMINANCE OF FACTORS LIKE PHYSICAL STRENGTH, AGILITY AND SPEED. DEPENDING ON THE MANNER OF KENDO-INSTRUCTION THIS TYPE OF STRENGTH CAN BE DIVIDED IN TWO VARIETIES: THE FIRST ONE IS FOUNDED ON SELF-CONFIDENCE AND TRUST IN TEACHERS, WHOSE PEDAGOGICAL SKILLS PROVIDE A MOTIVATION FOR PURSUING KENDO THROUGHOUT ONE’S LIFETIME. THE SECOND ONE IS BASED ON FEAR OF TEACHERS WHOSE PEDAGOGICAL ABILITY IS LIMITED TO OPPRESSIVE MEASURES AND PUNISHMENT. THIS ROBOTICAL STRENGTH CAN LEAD ALSO PROMISING STUDENTS TO QUIT KENDO AFTER HIGH-SCHOOL OR UNIVERSITY.

THEN THERE IS THE STRENGTH OF EXPERIENCE AND PATIENCE, WHICH INCREASES WITH AGE AND ALLOWS FOR A SHIFTING OF EMPHASIS FROM PHYSICAL TOWARDS MENTAL ASPECTS LIKE FOCUS AND INTUITION. THIS KIND OF STRENGTH ALLOWS FOR RESPONDING TO AN OPPONENT’S ACTIONS WITHOUT CONSCIOUS THOUGHT. IT IS SAID TO ENABLE SKILLED SWORDSMEN TO REACH A LEVEL WHERE THE OPPONENT’S INTENTIONS CAN BE “READ” LIKE AN OPEN BOOK. THIS STATE THAT HAS BEEN REFERRED TO AS “*MUSHIN*” OR “*MUNEN*” IN LITERATURE ON *KENJUTSU* SINCE THE EDO-PERIOD IS OFTEN REFERRED TO AS THE ULTIMATE STATE OF MIND FOR THE PRACTICING OF KENDO. STILL, INTUITION IN KENDO CAN BE ACHIEVED ALSO ON THE BASIS OF THE ABOVE MENTIONED “DEAD” STRENGTH, WITH A MINDSET SHAPED BY FEAR IN THE EARLY YEARS OF KENDO PRACTICE.

THE THIRD KIND WHICH TRANSCENDS BOTH THE STRENGTH OF YOUTH AND THE STRENGTH BROUGHT ABOUT BY EXPERIENCE IS THE STRENGTH OF THE HEART. ALTHOUGH THE CONNECTION WITH KENDO MIGHT NOT BE OBVIOUS, PLEASE ALLOW ME TO RELATE AN INCIDENT THAT CHANGED MY PERSONAL OUTLOOK ON CONCEPTS OF STRENGTH IN THIS BUDO.

IN EARLY SUMMER 2006 I WENT TO VISIT THE FLEA-MARKET AT TOGO-JINJA NEAR OMOTE-SANDO AND GOT OFF THE TRAIN AT HARAJUKU STATION. THE PASSAGE TOWARDS THE SOUTHERN EXIT WAS CROWDED AS USUAL ON SUNDAY MORNINGS. HAVING PASSED THROUGH THE TICKET-GATE I LOOKED FOR A SPOT TO STAND WITHOUT BECOMING OVERRUN. I TURNED AROUND TO WATCH THE MASSES SPILLING THROUGH

THE TICKET-GATES LIKE FISH FROM A BURSTING FULL NET ON A SHIP'S DECK. FOR A PERSON FROM THE COUNTRYSIDE THIS VIEW WILL ALWAYS REMAIN SOMEHOW SURREAL. THEN MY ATTENTION GOT CAUGHT BY A PECULIAR MOTION AT THE FAR END OF THE SLOPING PASSAGE. TWO PERSONS WERE APPROACHING MUCH SLOWER THAN THE FLOOD OF STYLISH YOUNG PEOPLE INTENT TO GO SHOPPING ON OMOTE-SANDO OR IN TAKESHITA-DORI. WHEN THEY GOT CLOSER I NOTICED THAT THEY WERE A PRETTY GIRL IN HER EARLY TWENTIES AND HER FATHER. THE FATHER WAS SHIELDING HIS DAUGHTER FROM THE SWIFT-FLOWING CURRENT OF THE SURROUNDING PEOPLE. SHE WAS WALKING IN THE AWKWARD AND UNCOORDINATED MANNER CHARACTERISTIC FOR A SPASTIC PARALYSIS. KNOWING THAT THIS IS BY NO MEANS A FLATTERING REACTION TOWARDS ANY HANDICAPPED PERSON I COULD NOT SUPPRESS THE IMPULSE TO PITY HER. IT WAS THEN THAT I CAUGHT A CLOSER GLIMPSE OF HER FACE AND ALL OF A SUDDEN FELT OVERPOWERED SO COMPLETELY THAT IT BECAME DIFFICULT TO DRAW BREATH. IN A FIGURATIVE SENSE THIS WAS THE STRONGEST HIT TO THE MEN I EVER RECEIVED.

SHE WAS BEAMING WITH HAPPINESS. WHETHER THIS WAS FROM THE PROSPECT TO BE TAKEN TO THE FASHION-PARADISE OF OMOTE-SANDO OR FOR ANOTHER REASON I CANNOT POSSIBLY TELL. BE THAT AS IT MAY, FROM HER, WHOSE BODY IS NOT FREE IN ITS MOTION WAS RADIATING AN INNER STRENGTH AND BEAUTY THAT I HAD NEVER ENCOUNTERED BEFORE. SHE STOOD OUT LIKE THE SWAN AMONG DUCKS FROM ANDERSEN'S FAIRY-TALE. WHILE WATCHING HER AND HER FATHER SLOWLY DISAPPEAR WITHIN THE CROWD THAT WALKED TOWARDS TAKESHITA-DORI, I FELT THE URGE TO THANK HER FOR LETTING ME SEE THE HAPPIEST FACE I HAVE EVER SEEN. HOWEVER, AS SHE PROBABLY HAD NOT NOTICED ME AT ALL I HAD NO COURAGE TO DO SO.

HAVING SEEN THIS BEAUTIFUL STRENGTH OF HEART IN COPING WITH, EVENTUALLY EVEN OVERCOMING, A PERMANENT PHYSICAL HANDICAP, SOME NOTIONS OF STRENGTH IN MODERN KENDO BEGAN TO APPEAR QUITE VAIN AND CHILDISH. AT PRESENT, ONE CRUCIAL GOAL OF HIGH-SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY-LEVEL KENDO IS THE PARTICIPATION IN AND THE WINNING OF SHIAI. DUE TO A TENDENCY TOWARDS WINNING AT ANY COST, A LARGE PART OF YOUTHFUL STRENGTH IS SPENT ON SOMETIMES ACROBATIC MANOEUVRES OF DEFENCE RATHER THAN ON STRAIGHTFORWARD ATTACK. THIS TREND LIKENS KENDO GRADUALLY TO MODERN EUROPEAN SPORT-FENCING, WHERE A MENTAL AND PHYSICAL ATTITUDE OF UPRIGHTNESS HAS LONG SINCE BEEN RENOUNCED. TEACHING YOUNG PEOPLE AN UPRIGHT AND STRAIGHTFORWARD OUTER ATTITUDE IN KENDO – ALSO FOR SHIAI - WILL ULTIMATELY PROVIDE THEM WITH AN UPRIGHT AND STRAIGHTFORWARD INNER ATTITUDE. FOR A START, WHY NOT CONSEQUENTLY INTRODUCE THE FOLLOWING TWO “HANDICAPS”? NO STEPPING BACK AND NO DUCKING AWAY FROM THE OPPONENT'S

ATTACK. AS MY TEACHER TAUGHT ME AGAIN RECENTLY: TO FURTHER TRUE STRENGTH OF THE HEART NOT ONLY IN KENDO, WE HAVE TO TRY TO MAINTAIN OUR BEST FACE (一番良い顔), NO MATTER HOW TOUGH THE CIRCUMSTANCES. TAKING THIS TO HEART AND TRYING TO APPLY THE LESSON SHE TAUGHT ME ALSO IN KENDO, I DEDICATE THESE LINES TO THE TRUTHFULLY STRONG GIRL ENCOUNTERED AT HARAJUKU.

PART 6: THE WAY OF THE WARRIOR IN JAPAN AND THE PHENOMENON OF EUROPEAN CHIVALRY (2) - THE LAST SAMURAI OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

“KENDO IS A SOMEHOW DEGENERATE FORM OF ANCIENT KENJUTSU AND HAS BECOME A COMPETITIVE MODERN SPORT.” THIS STATEMENT STANDS REPRESENTATIVE FOR A VARIETY OF SIMILAR VIEWS EXTANT AMONG EXPONENTS OF OLD-SCHOOL (*KORYŪ*) KENJUTSU, FENCING-HISTORIANS AND KENDOKA IN EAST AND WEST. IT CAN ALSO BE ENCOUNTERED AMONG STUDENTS OF THE RECENTLY REVIVED EUROPEAN MARTIAL ARTS OF THE 15TH AND 16TH CENTURY. STATEMENTS LIKE THE ONE ABOVE OFTEN STRESS THE “LACK OF COMBAT-EFFICIENCY” IN KENDO AND TEND TO IGNORE NOT ONLY ITS HISTORY, BUT ALSO ITS PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND. ONE ASPECT OF THIS BACKGROUND WAS TO ENNOBLE SINGLE-COMBAT BY THE ADHERENCE TO RULES CODIFIED BY WHAT IS COMMONLY TERMED *BUSHIDŌ* IN JAPAN AND *CHIVALRY* IN EUROPE. BOTH SYSTEMS HAVE BEEN INTERPRETED IN DIFFERENT WAYS THROUGHOUT HISTORY. ONE NOTION HOWEVER REMAINED UNCHANGED: ERUDITE WARRIORS WERE ESTEEMED AS MEN OF HUMANE PRINCIPLES AND IDEALS. THIS BASIC OUTLINE OF AN EDUCATED CHARACTER COULD BE SUMMARIZED BY THE TERM “GENTLEMANSHIP”.

NOWADAYS THE PURSUIT OF PHILANTHROPIC IDEALS IS OFTEN SNIGGERED AT. IN BUSINESS AS WELL AS IN SCIENCE THERE IS A SPREADING TENDENCY TO CYNICALLY REGARD IDEALISM AS WEAKNESS RATHER THAN STRENGTH. ON THE OTHER HAND THE PC-GAME INDUSTRY AND EVEN HOLLYWOOD RESPOND TO THE LONGING FOR SEEMINGLY OUTDATED IDEALS LIKE MAGNANIMITY, COURAGE, FAIRNESS, MODESTY, TOLERANCE ETC.. TWO REPRESENTATIVE MOVIES WERE RELEASED DURING THE LAST FEW YEARS, WHICH PROVIDED A CONTEMPORARY INTERPRETATION OF THE IMAGE OF THE NOBLE *BUSHI* AND THE NOBLE KNIGHT: “THE LAST SAMURAI“, (USA 2003) AND “KINGDOM OF HEAVEN“, (USA , SPAIN, BRITAIN 2005). DISREGARDING HISTORICAL INADEQUACIES, BOTH THESE MOVIES FOCUS ON SOME TRAITS OF A WARRIORS’ CODE OF HONOUR THAT WERE EXTANT THROUGHOUT HISTORY. BY CONCENTRATING ON NOBLE HEROES AND THEIR IDEALS, ANOTHER HISTORICAL FACT IS HIGHLIGHTED ACCIDENTALLY RATHER THAN INTENTIONALLY: PHILANTHROPIC TRAITS OF A WARRIORS’ CODE WERE ALWAYS GUARDED AND RESPECTED ONLY BY A SMALL

MINORITY. THIS OBSERVATION HOLDS TRUE FOR *BUSHIDO* AND CHIVALRY AS WELL AS FOR FAR MORE ANCIENT PERSIAN, ARABIC AND INDIAN CONCEPTS OF CHIVALROUS BEHAVIOUR.

APPARENTLY THIS HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH MODERN KENDO. OR HAS IT? THE POTENTIAL AND EVEN THE NECESSITY OF PURSUING THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SWORD FOR SPIRITUAL AND CHARACTER-DEVELOPMENT HAS BEEN EMPHASIZED BY SWORDSMEN FROM THE 16TH TO THE 20TH CENTURY. TO EARNESTLY CONSIDER THE GUIDELINES OF LITERATE SWORDSMEN WHO DEDICATED THEIR LIFE TO THE STUDY OF SWORDSMANSHIP WITHOUT EVER KILLING AN OPPONENT, OR TO PRACTICE KENDO AS A RECREATIONAL ACTIVITY IS ONE OF THE FIGURATIVE TWO-EDGED SWORDS REFERRED TO BEFORE. PRESERVING TRADITION FOR THE DULL SAKE OF PRESERVING TRADITION IS NOT THE POINT. AWARE OF THE STEADY DECLINE OF IDEALS DURING HIS LIFETIME YAMAOKA TESSHU STATED THE FOLLOWING AROUND 1885:

“THE DESIRE FOR FAME AND RICHES HAS SUBSTITUTED THE WISH FOR ENLIGHTENMENT. MODERN SCIENCE HOLDS A FASCINATION FOR EGOISTIC PEOPLE, WHO PREFER SCIENTIFIC ABSTRACTIONS TO HUMAN SENTIMENT.” (CITED AND TRANSLATED FROM: STEVENS, J.: ZEN-SCHWERTKUNST. DIE MUTÔ-RYÛ-SCHWERTSCHULE DES YAMAOKA TESSHÛ. HEIDELBERG 1995).

THIS OBSERVATION STILL HOLDS TRUE TODAY, BUT APPLIES IN A FAR LARGER CONTEXT THAN IN TESSHÛ'S TIME. BE THAT AS IT MAY, HAVING BEEN ALLOWED TO CATCH A GLIMPSE, I AM CONVINCED THAT KENDO ULTIMATELY TEACHES LIFE AND BENEVOLENCE IN A CONCENTRATED FORM. IF THIS PATH IS CHOSEN WITH DETERMINATION, A MEANINGFUL KENDO CAN DEFINITELY COUNTERBALANCE THE TENDENCY OUTLINED ABOVE. WITH SUCH PROSPECTS FOR THE PRESENT, REALITY AND EVEN PROFESSIONAL ROUTINE BECOMES EXCITING. THEN FICTIONS LIKE “THE LAST SAMURAI OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN” WILL BE TERMED BORING COMPARED TO THE ADVENTURES ENCOUNTERED ON THE WAY OF THE SWORD IN THE 21ST CENTURY.