THE MARTIAL ARTS OF MEDIEVAL EUROPE

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During the late Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, fighting books—*Fechtbücher*—were produced in northern Italy, among the German states, in Burgundy, and on the Iberian peninsula. Long dismissed by fencing historians as “rough and untutored,” and largely unknown to military historians, these enigmatic treatises offer important insights into the cultural realities for all three orders in medieval society: those who fought, those who prayed, and those who labored.

The intent of this dissertation is to demonstrate, contrary to the view of fencing historians, that the medieval works were systematic and logical approaches to personal defense rooted in optimizing available technology and regulating the appropriate use of the skills and technology through the lens of chivalric conduct. I argue further that these approaches were principle-based, that they built on Aristotelian conceptions of *arte*, and that by both contemporary and modern usage, they were martial arts. Finally, I argue that the existence of these martial arts lends important insights into the world-view across the spectrum of Medieval and early Renaissance society, but particularly with the tactical understanding held by professional combatants, the knights and men-at-arms.

Three treatises are analyzed in detail. These include the anonymous RA I.33 Latin manuscript in the Royal Armouries at Leeds; the early German treatise attributed to Hanko Döbringer that glosses the great Johannes Liechtenauer; and the collection of surviving treatises by the Friulian master, Fiore dei Liberi. Each is compared in order to highlight common elements of usage that form the principles of the combat arts.
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CHAPTER 1

SURVIVING FIGHT-BOOKS AND THE HISTORIOGRAPHY
OF MEDIEVAL COMBAT TECHNIQUES

…the noble warrior who cultivated his battering power in the lists
and tournaments and the accuracy of his eye by tilting at the ring
or quintain… learned little of what would avail him were he
deprived of his protective armour. Indeed, the chivalrous science
never had anything but a retarding effect on the science of fence.

-Egerton Castle

The purpose of this dissertation is to bring to light, and put into context, a series of little-
known fighting treatises from the thirteenth to the early fifteenth centuries. An analysis of these
treatises challenges the dominant position of fencing historians that these treatises were mere
“collections of tricks,” and it also attempts to show how the fight-books themselves shed light
into the stubbornly opaque martial culture of both medieval chivalry and of the larger body of
men (and women) who faced the challenge and prospect of violence during the period. My thesis
is that, despite the regional differences, the surviving medieval treatises represent a coherent art
of combat that leveraged the efficiencies of technology and culture into what amounts to a
medieval martial art, an art which made efficient use of both the weapon and the defensive
armour but which was bound into notions of normative or idealized behavior expressed in the
chivalric ethos. Further, I argue that there are two lineages for these arts, one essentially civilian
(fencing) and one military (fighting), and that these two lineages made distinct assumptions
about the amount of force which would have been necessary and appropriate in a combat.
Despite these different assumptions and applications of power, both traditions shared principles
that were known and taught through informal methods prior to the thirteenth and fourteenth
centuries, when they began to be recorded in writing for the first time. Finally, I argue that these
systems demonstrate far more expertise and skill-in-arms than is usually assumed, and that this
skill translated directly to cultural conceptions about the relationship between the right of self-defense and the sense of individualism which characterized European culture. Indeed, the value in the surviving fighting treatises is, apart from the new insights into chivalric culture of the period, as much about the appropriate use of self-defense as it is about the principles and techniques depicted.

Owing to my sources’ origins—one Italian and two German—I focus on the cultures of Western Europe, ranging from the British Isles in the west to the German principalities and Italy in the East. Along the way, I hope to create a sense of context for how the treatises present fighting as a systematic martial art, in the Aristotelian tradition of the definition of the word *arte*, and finally, to show how the production of such books might fit into the pedagogical traditions of informal education that characterized both the knightly and common orders. Indeed, the linkage of skill or prowess and control over violence and political legitimacy makes the sophisticated content of these books particularly interesting, owing to the connection between the free bearing of arms and the sense of individuality common in European cultures of the period. On a broad scale, this connection reflects and perhaps contributes to the conception of the tension between the church, the state and their relationships to the individual. What fighting meant is potentially as important—or perhaps more important—than the content of the books themselves. Regardless, these “martial arts” of medieval Europe yield a largely unexplored window into the martial culture of all three of the medieval orders—those who fought, those who worked, and those who prayed.

In order to accomplish this, I offer a detailed analysis of three representative treatises, utilizing a comparative approach which combines textual analysis with my years of “hands on” experience examining and teaching these systems to many hundreds of students. By doing so, I
hope to clearly establish the systematic nature of all three sources, comparing them and bringing in parallel references from medieval treatises on war, romances, chronicles, iconographic sources, and surviving artifacts. My intention is to take these pieces of corroborating evidence and use them to place the fighting treatises into their proper historical and literary contexts. In so doing, I hope to establish first that many medieval combatants practiced variations on what we might profitably think of as a European “martial arts” tradition that existed as early as the twelfth century and well into the age of gunpowder. I also hope to further establish the importance that the existence of such an art represents: that martial necessity drove rational, deliberate, and elegant solutions to the problems of personal defense. These solutions helped to crystallize and reinforce traditions of individual empowerment and responsibility that sparked the long tradition of individualism that characterized European culture as it rose into the Renaissance and through the Enlightenment.

Introduction

Students of medieval warfare and chivalric culture have long struggled to understand how medieval men fought. Surviving records, as preserved in chronicles, scattered accounts, diplomatic letters, rolls of decrees and court records, romances and knightly or princely handbooks, reveal very little about how medieval weapons were used. Surviving iconographic sources, for the most part stylized and created without precision of detail, have lent few insights and few studies have related them to physical technique or to the experience of the man-at-arms.¹ Surviving physical evidence, for the most part weapons and armour, have been grossly misunderstood and are generally ignored in favor of common misconceptions. A few works on

¹ An exception is J.R. Hale’s masterpiece, Artists and Warfare in the Renaissance, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990. For the most part, iconographic reference has been useful only in the study of surviving elements of physical culture, particularly arms and armour.
wound pathology, such as Bengt Thordemann’s *Armour from the Battle of Wisby*,\(^2\) and Veronica Fiorato’s *Blood Red Roses*,\(^3\) are sometimes used to reinforce the brutality of field combat with shock weapons,\(^4\) built as they are on the “worm’s-eye view” established by John Keegan in his groundbreaking 1976 work, *Face of Battle*.\(^5\)

The need to fill in the part of the “story” relating to medieval fighting, combined with the paucity of sources, has driven generations of historians to fill the gap with surprising assumptions. Successive waves of students exploring the middle ages through historical analyses have been regaled with assertions that medieval men, encumbered both by excessive armour and technical ignorance, fought with fury but without precision. John Keegan,\(^6\) alongside Victor Davis Hanson,\(^7\) found armour to have been unimaginably hot and impractical. The medieval fighting man is still thought to have been somehow less practical and less effective than his modern counterpart.

**Historiography**

As gunpowder supplanted the martial arts of medieval Europe, these arts underwent a profound transformation as personal combat retreated into the quasi-legal domains of the duels so beautifully and frightfully illuminated in Shakespearean theater. Out of this tradition, in turn,


\(^4\) Re-enactors, for example, have considerable expertise in what amounts to experimental archaeology, but the few formal studies made by authentically-minded medieval re-enactors have been largely ignored within even the most recent academic treatments of medieval battle. One such work, *The Medieval Soldier: 15th Century Campaign Life Recreated in Colour Photographs*, London: Windrow & Greene, 1994, is superb but stands alone.


\(^6\) Ibid., p. 106.

came the modern sport of fencing, and it is for the most part only fencing historians who have examined and attempted to explain these little-known manuscripts. This tradition, most recently and exquisitely analyzed by Sydney Anglo, has nonetheless characterized the medieval treatises as unsystematic and disorganized.

Likewise, military historians have completely ignored them, not because they have been unknown, but because they have never before been placed into an appropriate historical context. A small army of enthusiasts, fencers and martial artists have succeeded in rescuing the works from popular obscurity, and have produced some very fine translations and interpretations. But these works are very weak on context, and in fact generally focus on the technical aspects of the manuscripts while missing the overall principles and strategies.

It is perhaps easy to invent for ourselves an idealized conception of the Middle Ages and of the feudal society that formed its foundation. Given the relative scarcity and inaccessibility of source material, generations of scholars have generally filled in the gaps of knowledge with contemporary experience, which tell us more about the era of the scholar than of the medieval period itself. Indeed, true objectivity must remain an unattainable ideal, as the perspective of the commentator will forever require qualification before the presented evidence may be deemed credible. My hope is to convey an understanding of these treatises within their historical context, examining the cultural environment as well as their pedagogical heritage.

*Personal or “Micro” Combat and the Study of Military History*

It is true, as Egerton Castle asserted in 1893, that the knight’s harness provided a potent and practical defensive capability. But it is not necessarily true that this defensive capability translated into offensive disability or stagnation, or that his approach relied exclusively on
endurance. Indeed, to defeat an armoured man with shock weapons would instead encourage skill, precision and the efficient application of force. While a man could eventually if inefficiently be battered down in armour of mail or plate, he could more quickly be rendered ineffective or dispatched by attacking around the armour or applying focused energy at a critical point in his defense. Indeed, this is commonly accepted as the main reason for key changes in the design of the medieval sword at the dawn of the fourteenth century: it became both more acutely pointed and the handle was extended, allowing a second hand to be placed on the hilt, yielding both control and leverage. These are enhancements that require skill to maneuver the point between plates of iron and steel.

But writers looking at the Middle Ages and Renaissance have long followed Egerton Castle’s lead, when he asserted, “Paradoxical as it seems, the development of the ‘Art of Fence’ was the result of the invention of firearms.” And further,

little material exists to suggest a regularized training process involving an understanding of certain basic principles and of the techniques arising out of them. There was no coherent theory of personal combat that guaranteed success to the skilled man over an opponent relying on brute force. The strong man, the durable man, the man who could ride hardest and best take the punishment dealt out to him by the weapons of his opponent, was the winner. This was the period of pre-theory. It needed a revolution to change its combat techniques.

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8 Andrew W. Boardman, renowned War of the Roses scholar, argues from forensic and chronicle evidence that strength and endurance were predominant at least during his period, when fully-armoured knights equipped in the latest Italian or German “white armour” tended towards the use of dramatically more powerful pole-weapons, such as the poleaxe. While Boardman even includes a plate from the fifteenth-century German treatise by Hans Talhoffer, in none of his texts does he discuss the use of such weapons, for which Talhoffer was known at the time of the Wars of the Roses. At least three of Hans Talhoffer’s treatises survive from 1443, 1459, and 1467.


10 Ewart R. Oakeshott, Records of the Medieval Sword, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1991. See also Eduard Wagner, Swords and Daggers: An Illustrated Handbook, London: Hamlyn, 1975, for a more popular presentation. Oakeshott’s work is considered to be the standard reference, and he provides a broadly accepted development typology.

11 Egerton Castle, Schools and Masters of Defense, London: George Bell, 1885, p. 18.

Early writers on medieval military history, such as Sir Charles Oman, tended to see the knight as unimaginative in war, encumbered by absurd and weighty iron defenses, unable to effectively operate without armour or horse. As Oman wrote in his 1898 thesis, “…when mere courage takes the place of fighting skill and experience, tactics and strategy alike disappear.”¹³ His opinion was hardly changed by 1924, as he wrote in his magisterial two-volume *A History of War in the Middle Ages*, “…The [Hundred Years] war was carried on by a series of forays, sieges, and chivalrous but unscientific exploits of arms….”¹⁴ Arthur Wise, writing in 1971, concluded similarly, “The result was the fully armoured man, carrying some sixty pounds of sheet metal on the surface of his body. When he fought mounted, he had a certain mobility still, but when he fought on foot that mobility was considerably restricted.”¹⁵

John Keegan propelled the “new military history” into the mainstream with his magnificent 1976 work, *Face of Battle*, but the idea of unskilled reliance on physical endurance and strength was once more given fresh currency. Keegan, re-launching the “battle piece” narrative—this time from the soldiers’ rather than the generals’ point of view—sought to provide “a picture of understanding of the practicalities of the fighting and of the mood, outlook and skills of the fighters, which were themselves part of the eye-witness chronicler’s vision.”¹⁶ As compelling, worthy and influential as this study was, however, Keegan’s interpretation of those precise qualities he sought to illuminate—the soldiers’ “outlook and skills,” was flawed. Keegan, like many traditional academics, drew his conclusions based on synthesis of secondary sources, including those made by Charles Oman,¹⁷ Ferdinand Lot,¹⁸ Sir Harry Nicholas,¹⁹ and Col. Alfred

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¹⁵ Wise, p. 33.
Within the text, and seemingly without primary support, he recycles the traditional views of knights unable to move with efficiency or real effectiveness. For example, he asserts that during the retreat of English spearmen, “the men most exposed…trot[ed] backwards before the French spearpoints, ‘wrong-footing’ their opponents (a spearmen times his thrust to coincide with the forward step of his left foot).” It is not clear in the text where Keegan drew this or similar details from as they are not found in the sources cited in his bibliography. Based on the idea that neither men nor human responses have changed significantly since the Middle Ages, Keegan drew extensively on comparisons with modern circumstances. At the start of the chapter, for example, Keegan highlights a Vietnam protest in Grosvenor Square in London from 1968. It is likely that this kind of adaptation of modern studies informed many of his interpretations, but Keegan’s approach, echoed by Col. Grossman’s superb 1995 book On Killing, confuses students of medieval combat by ignoring romance literature, iconographic sources, and the fighting treatises and instead substituting modern experience. This approach is valuable, but should perhaps be used only as a supplement where historical data is missing or is in need of interpretation. The medieval fighting treatises, contemporary with the Battle of Agincourt, could have dramatically improved the authenticity of Keegan’s analysis.

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21 Keegan, The Face of Battle, p. 99. In fact, the fighting treatises often suggest moving the right foot with the thrust of a sword or spear, what George Silver called in the sixteenth century, “agreement of hand and foot.” Figures in the Fior di Battaglia show figures with either foot forward, but the right foot is shown clearly on Getty fol. 39v, reproduced in Massimo Malipiero, Il Fior di Battaglia di Fiore dei Liberi da Cividale, (Udine 2007), figure 255. Similarly, the mid-fifteenth century fighting master Filippo Vadi shows the same foot arrangement on fol. 28v, reproduced in Luca Porzio and Gregory Mele’s facsimile, entitled Ars Gladiatoria Dimicandi: 15th century swordsmanship of Master Filippo Vadi, Union City, CA: Chivalry Bookshelf, p. 142.
In order to establish the relevance of the fighting treatises it is thus necessary to eschew this tempting method at filling in missing gaps in the historical record and instead try to remain within the milieu that produced them. One of the earliest authors to have attempted to understand the man-at-arms in his cultural milieu was Ewart Oakeshott, although he too attempted to draw “modern” parallels:

Like the commandos and paratroops of our times, they [the knights] were fighting men who behaved within the mystique of their own specialized training. Ordinary men, whose work lay in the fields or the smith or the countinghouse, might not understand the strange loyalties and feuds, the apparent cruelties and the absurd generosities which surrounded these furious horsemen….24

The tripartite order that medieval society envisioned for itself was founded upon the martial prowess of the knights.25 This prowess, well-examined by modern cultural historians, laid the foundation for the nobility’s political legitimacy,26 but subsequent scholarship of the last twenty years has called into question the earlier negative view of the knight’s skills in war, including his tactical abilities, fighting skills, and even his strategic acumen. A rising tide of scholarship has given him broad credit for a shrewd tactical awareness and for his awareness of

25 Throughout this work I will set aside the anachronistic word “class” as an identifier for the medieval orders, because of the Marxist class warfare baggage which it carries with it. While peasant revolts are certainly an important aspect of thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth century history, I am more struck by the coherency and persistence of medieval conceptions of societal order that pervaded Western Europe during the period. Instead, the word “order” seems more appropriate, as it is the word employed by medieval commentators and theorists themselves, and it does not carry the modern connotations of inter-societal conflict.
the strengths—and more importantly, the weaknesses—of a dense, massed cavalry charge and its ability to break apart opposing units into incoherent, largely ineffective individuals. 27

This wave of scholarship has been based largely on the use of chronicles, the only narrative source available for much of the medieval period. 28 Such use of chronicles is fraught with danger, as the ongoing debate concerning their use has demonstrated. Kelly DeVries offers a strong methodological framework for the use of such chronicles, concluding, “With care, military history, especially that taking place on the battlefield or at sieges, can be reconstructed by comparing it with traditional practice.” 29 Such traditional practice may be found in corroborating chronicle, inventory and payment records, romance literature, knightly handbooks, military tracts, iconographic sources, and surviving artifacts. But it may also be found in another source thus far untapped by historians focused on military affairs or chivalric culture: the fighting treatises of medieval Europe.

The most recent academic studies, such as Matthew Bennet’s Fighting Techniques of the Medieval World,30 and Clifford J. Rogers’ Soldiers Lives Through History: The Middle Ages,31 better leverage surviving physical evidence than earlier efforts, but do not even mention the

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27 Most notable amongst this literature has been the work of John France, Western Warfare in the Age of the Crusades, 1000-1300, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999. France argues well for a coherent system of tactics that characterized knightly combatants. J.F. Verbruggen’s highly influential The Art of Warfare in Western Europe during the Middle Ages, trans. by Sumner Willard and R.W. Southern, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1997 (originally published as De Krijgskunst in West-Europa in de Middeleeuwen, IXe tot begin XIVe eeuw, 1954), must be considered seminal. Verbruggen offers an analysis of knightly tactics based on chronicle that paints a clear portrait of the use of massed cavalry and establishes its dominance from the twelfth through the fifteenth centuries.

28 For the most part this debate has taken place within the De Rei Militari society of medieval military scholars and published in the Journal of Medieval Military History, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2004-6. Additionally, Richard Abels and Stephen Morillo offer wise counsel regarding the tendency for later medieval writers to “classicize” and even plagiarize their works in issue number three of the journal, “A Lying Legacy? A Preliminary Discussion of Images of Antiquity and Altered Reality in Medieval Military History,” pp. 1-13, while John France discusses, “War and Sanctity: The Use of Saints’ Lives as Sources for Early Medieval Warfare,” also in issue number three, pp. 14-22.


existence of the more than twenty surviving medieval fighting treatises. While Bennet’s book is essentially a very good if curiously-named battle narrative surveying well-known medieval battles, Rogers systematically examines nearly every aspect of operations using a potent array of primary sources reinforced by iconographic references in a superb presentation of life on the medieval battlefield prior, during and after a campaign. Neither book, however, referenced the fighting treatises. A related work, Matthew Strickland’s The Great Warbow, similarly made no mention but does draw heavily from the finds of the Henry VIII’s ship the Mary Rose (which was sunk during an action against the French in 1545, was found again in 1967 and was raised in 1982 with much of her cargo), a welcome step towards the inclusion of surviving artifacts into the resulting tapestry that must result from a careful inquiry into the culture of men-at-arms whose lives touched the written record only sparingly.  

If few academics yet view medieval fighting as a European martial art, the most recent writers have at least given the knights the benefit of the doubt in terms of their reputed skill. Maurice Keen, examining the culture and definition of chivalry in his landmark 1984 book Chivalry, emphasized the knights as a practical-minded international military culture. Richard Kaeuper took up and sharpened the focus on this point in his potent Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe, where he argued for the paramount place in the chivalric ideology for physical skill in arms, better known as prowess. Malcom Vale, writing in War & Chivalry, demonstrated that these martial values were employed under the stress of battle and that practically-minded knights solved problems in a rational way. Steven Muhlberger’s Deeds of Arms emphasized the

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Bert S. Hall’s *Weapons and Warfare in Renaissance Europe* accepts Keen’s cultural arguments in striving to reconstruct a more nuanced picture of how gunpowder weapons were accepted into European armies. Over the course of his long and illustrious career J.R. Hale attempted to view the Renaissance soldier through the lenses of surviving artwork and literature, while Michael Mallet has done extensive work in attempting to resurrect the reputation of the Italian *condottieri* of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Slightly older works, such as Richard Barber’s *The Knight and Chivalry*, Francis Gies’ *The Knight in History*, and Vesey Norman’s *The Medieval Soldier* were all written during the 1970s and early 1980s. Although still top-selling popular histories, none include the treatises.

Similarly, few of the works on the medieval tournament make the connection to the principles and techniques for such feats expressed in the fighting treatises. The keystone text, Richard Barber and Juliet Barker’s work *Tournaments*, includes only a few translated passages from the knightly handbook and jousting treatise by King Dom Duarte of Portugal, but is otherwise silent on the existence of the treatises, even though the Burgundian *Jeu de la Hache*, Talhoffer’s *Fechtbücher*, and Francesco Novati’s 1902 edition of Fiore dei Liberi’s *Flos Duellatorum* could have brought significant insight into what is otherwise an outstanding text. It is perhaps not surprising that Juliet Barker’s own work, *The Tournament in England, 1100-
1400\textsuperscript{43} makes no mention of the treatises—as none are known from England during the period she considers—but this omission is more curious in Evelyn van der Neste’s Tournois, Joutes, Pas d’Armes dan les Villes de Flanders a la fin du Moyen Age, 1300-1486,\textsuperscript{44} or in Duccio Balestracci’s La Festa in Armi: Giostre, tornei, e giochi del Medioevo.\textsuperscript{45} The latter is most curious since one might have expected to find a closely related work, Fiore dei Liberi da Premariacco e i ludi e le feste marziale in Friuli, by G. Zanutto, in his works cited; but it is absent.\textsuperscript{46}

The survival of the fighting treatises has thus not yet penetrated onto the radar of historians working on topics relating to medieval warfare, knighthood and chivalry, or the medieval tournament. Many of these scholars, such as Kelly DeVries, Clifford J. Rogers, Steven Muhlberger, and Richard Barber are well aware that the treatises exist. I believe the reason that they have not yet been welcomed into the corpus of acceptable sources is that they have not, as yet, been systematically analyzed either for their content or, more importantly, for their context. Without analysis that establishes what the treatises mean, historians working on these topics will be forced to continue drawing their conclusions from modern parallels, from romance and iconography, and the idea of medieval personal combat as being devoid of skill will likely persist.

\textit{Historians on the Art of Fencing}

Historians working on the history of the art of fencing have long been aware that fight-\hspace{-0.5cm}

\textsuperscript{44} Evelyne van der Neste, Tournois, Joutes, Pas d’Armes dan les Villes de Flanders a la fin du Moyen Age, 1300-1486, Paris: École des Chartes, 1996.
\textsuperscript{46} G. Zanutto, Fiore dei Liberi da Premariacco e i ludi e le feste marziale in Friuli, Udine: D. del Bianco, 1907.
books dating from the late thirteenth century exist. Like Egerton Castle, himself a fencing historian, they have tended to disregard the medieval masters as primitive, “rough untutored,” and lacking in “understanding” for the geometric principles that became part of the art of fencing beginning with the great Bolognese masters in the sixteenth century, “the stoutest arm and the weightiest sword won the day.” This anachronistic view of “progress” towards the refined sport of fencing led most to give the medieval masters, and the art of combat they taught, short shrift.

Most fencing historians, even those whose famous exploration of the medieval techniques such as Sir Alfred Hutton, Sir Richard Burton and Captain Cyril Matthey, viewed the early fighting treatises of Fiore dei Liberi and the German masters through the lenses of established nineteenth century maîtres-des-armes, just as Hans Delbrück viewed medieval tactics through the lens of Clausewitz’s *On War* and of the Napoleonic experiences that formed it. As a result, their early analysis tended to conclude that the medieval systems of defense lacked the precision and efficiency they found in the sixteenth century Italian masters.

Sir Egerton Castle remains the doyen of fencing historians, and his assessment of the medieval and early Renassiance works were later followed almost to the letter, when he asserted that they were, “quite as useless as those old and ponderous ‘Fechtbücher’ and ‘Tratados de la filosofia de las Armas’ which have been so religiously laid aside for centuries.” This sense of

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48 Ibid., p. 6.
49 Alfred Hutton, *The Sword and the Centuries: 500 Years of European Swords and the Duels that Have been Fought with Them*, London: G. Richards, 1892.
51 Captain Mattingly was part of a unique group of young British officers whose enthusiastic passion for fencing led them to establish an informal club, the London Rifle Brigade Fencers, to explore the historical masters during the 1870s. See Alfred Hutton’s *The Sword and the Centuries*, pp. xvii – xix. Officers and young aristocrats drove the study of fencing during the nineteenth century as the modern three weapons’ styles (foil, epee and saber) were developed.
52 Castle, pp. 2-3. A captain of engineering and a prolific writer, Castle was also a longtime student of swordsmanship, captain of the 1908 British fencing team. He gave lectures on historical swordsmanship, including one recorded in the *Who’s Who in the World, 1912* edition as “The Story of Swordsmanship,” at the Lyceum Theater. He also produced a fencing bibliography that appeared in Pollack’s 1889 book simply entitled, *Fencing*. 

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dismissiveness stems from two points, I believe. First, the impenetrability of the texts obscures the systematic art of combat depicted. Castle wrote on this point directly, “The difficulty, first, of getting at the old authors on sword-play, and secondly, when found, realizing their meaning in the midst of their philosophical digressions, seems to have hitherto prevented the investigation of the subject.”

Second, the post-industrial sense of progressivism and modernism yields a potent distortion which made it very difficult for such writers to ascribe expertise to people they viewed as pre-modern. Castle demonstrates this while asserting the superiority of his modernity:

“It can be asserted that the theory of fencing has reached all but absolute perfection in our days—when the art has become practically useless…It seems paradoxical, therefore, that the management of the sword should be better understood now than in the days when the most peaceable man might be called upon at any time to draw in defense of his life.”

Castle goes on to attempt to surmount at least the first difficulty, although it is clear he is unaware of the second. He will fail at both and, in the process, will consign this valuable cache of treatises to obscurity for the next hundred years, “A critical examination of the old treatises shows, however, that in the heyday of the dueling mania, more reliance was evidently placed on agility and ‘inspiration’ than on settled principles.” We will see Castle’s formula again and again in the works of all the fencing historians who have followed. Their simultaneous claim of the medieval works as dueling texts and their dismissal as unsystematic will make them unappealing as sources even beyond the narrow world of fencing historians.

But a detailed analysis of the treatises will show precisely that they do show a foundation of settled principles. And these principles, understood in their historical context, shed light not

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53 Castle, p. 3.
54 Ibid. Further, he writes on page five, “But it is the keen swordsman who looks upon foil fencing as the key to all hand to hand fighting, that the historical development of the art offers naturally the greatest interest.” Few modern combatants in this author’s day would consider foil fencing as a suitable preparation for any kind of hand-to-hand fighting. And yet, this sense of progressivism and modernism pervades modern teaching of martial arts and fencing.
55 Ibid., pp. 33-4.
only on the fighting techniques employed by knights, men-at-arms, civilians and clergy, but also into the martial art that blended a philosophical world-view with the art into a coherent martial art. Those very tracts that so distracted Castle connect the techniques into the broader chivalric culture of the medieval and early Renaissance period.

Thus, according to Castle’s formula, the art of fencing started perhaps as early as the mid-fifteenth century with the advent of gunpowder, which supplanted the reliance on armour and forced men to rely on the sword alone for defense.\textsuperscript{56} The sword supplanted other forms of shock weapon by 1500, and its use was thus divorced from contemporary military practice.

Arthur Wise, writing in 1965, echoed this technological determinism: “Energy that had previously been spent on designing new methods of cracking armour, was now diverted to considerations of new methods of using the sword.”\textsuperscript{57} Writing of personal combat in the middle ages, he reflected Egerton Castle’s sense of progressivism to perfection. Wise includes no illustrations of any of the known medieval manuscripts, including anonymous RA MS I.33 (c. 1295); Hanko Döbringer, (1389); Fiore dei Liberi’s four known books (1409-20); the previously published fifteenth century works of Hans Talhoffer (1443, 1459, 1467);\textsuperscript{58} or the other medieval books known then from the \textit{Kunst des Fechten} first established by Johannes Liechtenauer. These references were included in the fencing bibliographies of Egerton Castle and Richard Burton, both included in Wise’s own list of references for \textit{The History and Art of Personal Combat}.

\textsuperscript{56} Of course the gunpowder weapons themselves were important, but to fencing historians, unarmoured dueling was tied to the technological advance of gunpowder and the art and science of defense was found only with the banishment of armour.

\textsuperscript{57} Arthur Wise, p. 34.

\textsuperscript{58} Curiously, two of Gustav Hergsell’s other books were included in Wise’s bibliography, including \textit{Unterricht im Sabelfechten} (1885); \textit{Die Fechtkunst} (1881); and \textit{Duell-Codex} (1891). Hergsell’s reprints of Talhoffer, which had been reprinted in French and German by 1900, are not mentioned. One wonders if the Wise omitted them either because he was unaware of their existence or, more likely, because he could not decode them. All of the major treatises were included in main fencing bibliography, published in 1903 by Jacopo Gelli, \textit{Bibliografia del Duello: con numerose note sulla questione del Duello e sulle recenti Leghe antiduellistiche di Germania, Austra e Italia, Milan: Hoepli, 1903}. More accessibly, Carl Thimm’s influential bibliography had also been published in the same year, and it contained a full listing of Hergsell’s works, as well as works attributed to Johannes Liechtenauer and others.
None of the medieval works are mentioned in the text, but he may have been referring to the RA I.33 treatise, considered in detail in our chapter 2, when he concluded, “There was here a continuous tradition of sword and buckler play, but it was a tradition that relied very much on personal tricks and personal ability. It was not a tradition that had thrown up any systematic practice or theory.”

Further in the text, he writes that Achille Marozzo’s 1536 *Opera Nova* was “the first coherent system of handling the sword in personal combat….” Wise followed Castle’s lead with the precision of a wingman, following the usual formula of ascribing medieval technique to an unskilled reliance on strength, endurance, experience and individual tricks, and failing to see any systematic approach in the quickly dismissed surviving manuscripts.

Classical and competitive fencers utilize the same now-traditional formula in the brief histories that preface their technical works on modern fencing. Nick Evangelista’s 1996 *The Art and Science of Fencing* articulates the usual position:

> During the Middle Ages, the sword was used almost exclusively in an offensive capacity. Personal protection, one’s defense, was derived from the wearing of heavy metal armor. Broad, cumbersome blades were, therefore, needed to smash through such obstructions. This translated into very little specialized weapon maneuvering, either offensively or defensively. Swords were, in effect, nothing more than giant can openers….61

More than many fencing coaches, Evangelista was interested in the history of his art and took pains to trace the art of “defensive” use of the blade through the Italian treatises before presenting his lineage and credentials.

Adam Adrian Crown, a well-known classical fencer and master, starts with the history of fence in 1474, with the Spanish school and two now-lost works, “Among the earliest works on

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59 Arthur Wise, p. 34.
60 Ibid, p. 35.
61 Nick Evangelista, *The Art and Science of Fencing*: Indianapolis: Masters Press, 1996. To be fair, in 1996 none of the current facsimile translations had been published and Evangelista was following the tradition of his school.
the subject were those of Jayme Pons and Pedre de la Torre….62 No mention is made of Fiore dei Liberi or of the many German treatises which had been brought to light by 2001, when his book was published.

Many abbreviated histories of fencing do not mention the early treatises at all. Aldo Nadi, the great three-weapon champion and master (an Olympic gold medalist in all three weapons, 1928), asserted part of the usual formula, that fencing began with study for the duel, “Swordsmanship could not very well be learned by dying in a duel. It required study. The practicing weapon was simply a rapier with the point flattened out. Thus, fencing became an art.”63 He was speaking of the era after 1500, and the first treatise mentioned is Giacomo de Grassi (1570). For his unquestioned greatness as a fencer and coach, like many modern fencers, he had little interest in the history of his art, “I have never read more than one sentence in each of the various books on fencing, which have been put, unsolicited, into my hands.”64

William Gaugler, writing in his 1998 The History of Fencing, briefly mentions the Friulian master Fiore dei Liberi, but writes, “…in 1413 Neppo Bardi, a professor at the University of Bologna, obtained a license from municipal authorities to open a fencing school, we have our first proof of an educational institution offering formal instruction in the art of swordplay…it appears to have provided the foundation for sixteenth century Bolognese fencing pedagogy.”65 Because Gaugler’s interest is focused on the development of the “classical” fencing

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63 Aldo Nadi, On Fencing, New York: G.P. Putnams, 1943, p. 17. William Gaugler, discussed below, was Nadi’s student and has continued the tradition of Italian classical fencing in the United States, and running the nation’s only Fencing Masters’ Program, founded in 1979, still offered through San Jose State University.
64 Ibid., p. 39. This is not to take away anything from Nadi’s profound contribution to the fencing community, but it might have saved him from some embarrassing historical statements.
65 Ibid., p. xv – xvi.
tradition, “based on five hundred years of fencing experience,” and his objective of preserving that tradition, the earlier medieval schools were of little interest. In a way, Gaugler’s work is useful because it separates fencing practice from the earlier works, which we may then consider as the older tradition of martial arts, defined as systems of personal defense constructed on a philosophical foundation that helps to define the appropriate use of violence and the place of the combatant in his larger society.

Even the most recent work, such as Richard Cohen’s extremely popular By the Sword, presents the same tired view, “the [medieval] sword was used primarily to bludgeon one’s opponent.” Cohen writes in the same paragraph, “Parries with the blade were avoided, and knights either evaded blows or used their shields for defense…”

Thus, fencing historians and popular writers have tended to draw their lineage from dueling culture, which is accurate, following Castle’s lead. It is perhaps the very connection to military culture, with the medieval treatises underscoring of the importance of strength as well as precision that connects them more firmly to the military chivalric culture than to the civilian dueling culture to which fencing historians are understandably drawn.

Counterpoint

Despite Castle’s enduring influence, the treatises have, from time to time, been reproduced and examined. During the 1880s, Gustav Hergsell, alongside a few other German historians studying the art of fence, published three of the surviving five works by the fifteenth

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66 Ibid., p. xvi.
century master Hans Talhoffer, thus raising the awareness of the German treatises.\textsuperscript{69} German readers of the time appear to have been interested in the workings of the \textit{Federfechter} and \textit{Marxbrüder},\textsuperscript{70} urban fencing schools that flourished in the sixteenth century. Carl Wassmannsdorff, as respondent, maintained an ongoing debate with Hergsell in the last years of the nineteenth century over technical aspects of the German historical art.\textsuperscript{71} This dialogue, which established the importance of the influence of Johann Liechtenauer, the fourteenth century German \textit{magister in arms} whose teaching verse, known as \textit{zettel}, guided two centuries of German fencing tradition. In 1902 Frederich Dörnhöffer published a facsimile of the \textit{Fechtbüch} of Albrecht Dürer, but after Dörnhöffer, little was written on the German masters until 1965.\textsuperscript{72} The 1505 grappling treatise of Hans Wurm was reprinted in facsimile, but without significant commentary by Hans Bleibrunner, in 1969.\textsuperscript{73} In 1965 Martin Wiershin published a doctoral dissertation, \textit{Meister Johann Liechtenauers Kunst des Fechtens}.\textsuperscript{74} This was followed in 1985 by Peter Hans-Hils, whose dissertation, \textit{Meister Johann Liechtenauers Kunst des langen Schwertes}, focused on techniques with the \textit{langenschwert} across the Liechtenauer-influenced treatises.\textsuperscript{75} Both Wiershin and Hans-Hils found cohesive martial systems represented in Meister Liechtenauer’s works, but few students followed their work and neither published substantially

\textsuperscript{69} Hans Talhoffer and Gustav Hergsell, \textit{Talhoffers Fechtbüch (Gothaer codex) aus dem Jahre 1443}, Prague: Selbstverlag, 1889; \textit{Talhoffers Fechtbüch (Ambraser codex) aus dem Jahre 1459}, Prague: Selbstverlag, 1889; \textit{Talhoffers Fechtbüch aus dem Jahre 1467, Gerichtliche und andere zweikämpfe darstellend}, Prague: J. G. Calve, 1887.

\textsuperscript{70} Carl Wassmannsdorff, \textit{Sechs Fechtschulen (d.i. Schau- und Preisfechten) der Marxbrüder und Federfechter aus den Jahren 1573 bis 1614; Nürnberger Fechtschulreime v.j. 1579 und Rösener's Gedicht: Ehrentitel und Lobspruch der Fechtkunst v.j. 1589}, Heidelberg: Karl Groos, 1870.


\textsuperscript{72} Frederich Dörnhöffer and Albrecht Dürer \textit{Fechtbüch}, Bd. 27, Heft 6. Wien: F. Tempsky, 1910.


\textsuperscript{75} Peter Hans-Hils, \textit{Meister Johann Liechtenauers Kunst des langen Schwertes}, Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1985.

While most English writers follow Egerton Castle, Captain Alfred Hutton, himself a member of the elite London Rifle Brigade—which gave exhibitions on historical fencing in the early and mid-1890s—took a more conciliatory approach:\footnote{Captain Hutton dedicated his final work, Cold Steel: \textit{Cold Steel: A Practical Treatise on the Saber}. London: William Clowes & Sons, Ltd., 1899, “to my friend, Egerton Castle, F.S.A.”}

There are those who pretend that previous to the sixteenth century, the age of the rapier, fencing did not exist except amongst the lower orders, and that the nobles and knights, despised it altogether, and trusted only to the brute force of their strong right arms and to the splendid temper of their plate armour, and this they did to a considerable extent, especially in their mounted combats, where the lance was used; but we find these very knights arming themselves for defense with shields, and wherever we see the attack warded by any kind of defensive weapon we have to recognize the art of fence, albeit in archaic form….\footnote{Alfred Hutton, \textit{The Sword and the Centuries Or, Old Sword Days and Old Sword Ways: Being a Description of the Various Swords Used in Civilized Europe During the Last Five Centuries, and of Single Combats Which Have Been Fought with Them}. London: G. Richards, 1892, p. 1.}

Hutton went on the detail accounts of the sword drawn from the pages of European chronicle, which included translated passes from Olivier de la Marche’s fifteenth-century chronicle of Jacques de Lalain, the Burgundian master of the poleaxe; a chivalric duel; a judicial duel; and two transcriptions of cryptic fifteenth century Middle English poems on the sword, then in the possession of the British Museum.\footnote{These are now in the British Library, Harleian MS. 3542 ff. 82-5. These poems, have peculiar linguistic elements which have kept them from broad interpretation, despite several attempts by several modern students of the medieval martial arts.} Clearly Captain Hutton had more regard for the pre-sixteenth century arts of combat than did his friend Castle, but even Captain Hutton was a product of his time and saw the “art of fence” as evolving from the less evolved to the more so.

Luigi Barbasetti followed in this same vein and goes on to suggest a strikingly current cultural approach to the historical treatises:
the hand to hand encounters in the Iliad show with sufficient clarity that in the earliest
history of the ancient Greeks, fencing had its principles, its standards and its rules, and
that many people succeeded in acquiring the art. The objection does not hold that the duel
in those times degenerated into a mere exchange of blows, as heavy as possible…equally
absurd is the assertion that the art of fighting in the Middle Ages consisted of being able
to stay in the saddle and to deal forceful blows…we cannot emphasize enough that one
should consider the customs and institutions of ancient times alone, uncolored by modern
usage, while keeping the historical viewpoint in mind.80

He goes on to briefly survey the printed facsimiles by Francesco Novati and Gustav
Hergsell discussed below, concluding that a “certain analogy with regard to the weapons and to
instructions regarding them.”81 It is a striking foreshadowing of my own conclusions.

For many English writers, the focus falls to rest on an Englishman, George Silver, whose
1599 Paradoxes of Defence was carefully restored to the public eye by Col. Cyril Mattingly, one
of the Hutton/Egerton circle of historical swordsmanship enthusiasts who also had an interest in
the improvement of British military use of the saber. Mattingly produced a fine collection of
Silver’s books in 1898, and went on to advocate for a revision of British saber technique based
on the principles found in Silver’s works.82 Silver’s Paradoxes of Defence was again reprinted
by the Shakespeare Association in 1933.83 Terry Brown, following in this tradition, synthesized
Silver and later surviving English sources in his 1997 English Martial Arts.84 Paul Wagner
offered a new edition of Silver’s works with a substantial commentary in 2003.85

J.D. Aylward, the great historian of fencing, writing in 1956, connected the existence of
English fencing masters, which he documented as early as the thirteenth century, with broad
influence in maintaining the ancient right of Englishmen to bear arms and use them skilfully. By way of evidence he brought considerable research skills to bear, mining English Pipe rolls, alongside a plethora of other nearly opaque archival sources surviving in British libraries, tracing the civilian tradition of fencing masters through court records and royal proclamations. He is careful to maintain his division between civilian tradition of fencing and the military uses, focusing on the former in order to make his case regarding the connection between the skilled bearing of arms and the nature of English constitutional freedoms. His work makes no use of the medieval treatises per se, but does present considerable material on the influence of the sixteenth century English master, George Silver. Aylward’s archival approach, however, would be picked up and greatly expanded by the most recent and thorough exploration of the “master-at-arms” approach to the treatises, done by Sydney Anglo in 1998.

Recent Historiography of the Fighting Treatises

After 1956, there is little written in English on the topic until the 1990s, when British scholar, Sydney Anglo, began to work on chivalric treatises. The capstone of a long and distinguished career, but by no means Professor Anglo’s last work, The Martial Arts of Renaissance Europe argued persuasively for recognition of sophistication within the late sixteenth century fighting treatises in particular. The book provides an in-depth analysis of all known European fencing schools, although the emphasis is on the post-1500 works. Despite the work’s enduring value, the medieval treatises, dating from c.1295 – 1500, remain frustratingly

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and stubbornly obscure. With regard to the treatises of Fiore dei Liberi, for example, Anglo
writes, “Masters and students are distinguished by the expedient of wearing a crown, although
this scheme is not carried out as consistently as in MS I.33…the various hand positions are
generally well indicated…there appears to be a serious attempt to arrange each group of postures
relating to some particular type of combat in a logical sequence.”88 Anglo assesses the
effectiveness of the masters surveyed based on their connection to modern, scientific
presentation, a much more sophisticated and academically rigid assessment but perfectly in line
with what had been written before. He does not see the system within Fiore’s treatises
presentation because he is unaware of the “key” necessary to “unlock” the fighting sequences,
which Fiore gives in his Prologue.89 Similarly this occurs with the RA I.33 sword and buckler
treatise, and the early German treatises. While Anglo finds a coherent martial art amongst the
Renaissance masters, where grappling, cutting and thrusting are all integrated and taught in
systematic ways, he does not conclude a similar result for the medieval masters.

Perhaps because the sport of fencing has long been important in Italy, students of
traditional fencing styles have blossomed there. The first known Italian writer, Fiore dei Liberi,
has enjoyed particular attention during the twentieth century. In 1902, Francesco Novati, the
noted scholar of Italian medieval literature, published a facsimile of Fiore dei Liberi’s Flos
Duellatorum, then and still in the possession of the Pisani-Dossi family.90 D. Luigi Zanutto
attempted a biography of Fiore 1907,91 and Carlo Bascetta included a section of Fiore’s 1409

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91 D. Luigi Zanutto, Fiore dei Liberi da Premariacco e I ludi e le feste marziale in Friuli, Udine: D. del Bianco, 1907.
treatises as part of his 1978 *Sport e Giuochi*, although it was largely drawn from Novati and Zanutto.

Since 1990, Marco Rubboli has presented editions with light commentary on Fiore dei Liberi, on an anonymous Bolognese master, and on Filippo Vadi. Giovanni Rapsardi has similarly published facsimiles with commentary on Fiore dei Liberi, and Achille Marozzo. The duplication of these efforts reflects the sharp division amongst Italian students of fencing into traditional disparate factions. Massimo Malipiero, a student of the Fiore dei Liberi style and Laureato in Archeologia Classica at the University of Padua, has presented a facsimile transcription of the Getty version of Fiore dei Liberi’s treatise, the *Fior di Battaglia*, together with his own commentary.

Publications since 2000 have represented many of the surviving treatises published in facsimile translations. Key works in this corpus are the earliest known European fighting treatise, RA MS I.33; the *Fechtbücher* of Paulus Kal, Hans Talhoffer, the *Codex Wallerstein*,

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Fiore dei Liberi,\textsuperscript{103} and Filippo Vadi.\textsuperscript{104} Wrestling books, such as Hans Czynner’s \textit{Würgegriff und Mordschlag} articulate the depth of grappling knowledge held across writers of the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance.\textsuperscript{105}

Atop these works are interpretations of the fighting systems represented. The first English work in this line is John Clements’ 1998 \textit{Medieval Swordsmanship}, which brought many of the earlier treatises to the attention of many fencers, re-enactors, and martial artists.\textsuperscript{106} Some collected works, such as my own \textit{Teaching and Interpreting Historical Swordsmanship},\textsuperscript{107} Stephen Hand’s SPADA I and SPADA II,\textsuperscript{108} help to provide a place for peer-reviewed articles. Most interpreters, unfortunately, repeat the mistakes of earlier writers and examine the medieval masters as collections of related technique, often failing to look deeply enough to distill the connective tissue necessary to transform the collection of techniques into systematic responses. Others better understand the connective art that binds the systems together. There are many books that fall into this category, including Guy Windsor’s \textit{The Swordsmans’ Companion},\textsuperscript{109} Christian Henry Tobler’s \textit{Secrets of German Medieval Swordsmanship};\textsuperscript{110} and his \textit{Fighting with the German Longsword};\textsuperscript{111} Herbert Schmidt’s \textit{Schwert-Kampf};\textsuperscript{112} David Lindholm’s \textit{Sigmund


\textsuperscript{104} Filippo Vadi, Luca Porzio and Gregory Mele, \textit{Ars Gladiatoria Dimicandi: 15th century Swordsmanship of Master Filippo Vadi}, Union City, CA: Chivalry Bookshelf, 2002.


\textsuperscript{111} Christian Henry Tobler, \textit{Fighting with the German Longsword}, Union City: Chivalry Bookshelf, 2004.
Ringeck’s *Knightly Art of the Longsword*;¹¹³ *Primoris*, by Mark Lancaster, Mark Berryman and James Payton; Jason Vail’s *Medieval and Renaissance Dagger Combat*;¹¹⁴ Steaphen Fick’s *The Beginner’s Guide to the Longsword: Western Martial Arts Weaponry Techniques*;¹¹⁵ Michael Thomas’ *Fighting Man’s Guide to German Longsword Combat*;¹¹⁶ and most especially, Colin Richardson’s *Fiore dei liberi 1409 wrestling & dagger*;¹¹⁷ are uneven in their depth of understanding and most offer a technique-centric view that only reinforces established opinions with regard to the “collectana” nature of surviving medieval works. André Schultz and Klaus Diehl’s trio of Talhoffer interpretations, by contrast, are of a very high quality.¹¹⁸ Similarly, in the Italian, Galvini di Graziano’s study of Fiore dei Liberi¹¹⁹ is matched by Massimo Malipiero’s *Il Fior di Battaglia*,¹²⁰ both fine and deeply researched works. My own *Sword in Two Hands* and forthcoming *Masters of the Crossed Swords* are textbooks for the Schola Saint George, our

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school for historical swordsmanship, which seeks to present Fiore’s *arte d’armizare* as a cohesive martial art based on clear principles.121

The uneven quality of these efforts has tended to retard the acceptance of the idea that the practice of medieval weapon-arts was at least sometimes systematic and far more sophisticated than is often assumed. While the facsimile translations are starting to find acceptance amongst students of medieval military and art of fencing historians, the systems represented remain obscure and will remain so until new generations of more rigorous interpreters document their assertions and provide proof that the techniques shown represent systematic approaches to personal or “micro” combat.

Some inroads are being made with students of Asian martial arts. The aforementioned 1990s articles by Matthew Galas began to link European and Asian martial arts in the *Journal of Asian Martial Arts*. J. Christoph Amberger, who’s 1996 *The Secret History of the Sword: Adventures in Ancient Martial Arts* and influential Hammerterz Forum have acquainted thousands with a new appreciation for the ancient, medieval and classical sources. Indeed, regarding the medieval treatises, Amberger writes, “Even a superficial analysis of the historical evidence has to arrive at the undisputable conclusion. The modern judgment of the quality of classical and medieval fencing systems is overly simplistic if not downright patronizing.”122

The title of Sydney Anglo’s and Terry Brown’s books stirred still more interest and provided a cornerstone work that surveyed the spectrum of fighting skill, including grappling, joint-locks and throws, that demonstrate kinesthetic understanding and comprehension. Some of the better interpretative works, such as the previously mentioned series interpreting Hans

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Talhoffer by André Schultz, are starting to gain traction amongst students of Asian martial arts. This “advance” into the consciousness of the Asian martial arts community, spurred by publications since 1990, is a start—but the challenge now is to extend the depth of research into the European fighting treatises to explore to what extent we can find a tradition of systematic martial arts within medieval culture.\textsuperscript{123} Still, none of these works have delved into the art of the combat systems presented by the medieval treatises or placed them firmly within their historical context.

Working Definitions

\textit{Medieval vs. Renaissance}

The period that saw the treatises under examination here, from 1295-1420, can be difficult to label. The terms “medieval” and “renaissance” are themselves products of the nineteenth century, when the period between the classical era of Greece and Rome and the enlightenment had to be characterized in some way. But this characterization itself contains contextual baggage borne of the ideas of “progress” and “modernity” which seek to apply the theories of Charles Darwin to human societies as well as to species. Still, the terms have proved a useful shorthand to describe cultural, social, military and economic phenomenon, so long as appropriate cautions are taken. Firm delineations, however, are difficult if not nonsensical.

But in terms of understanding distinctions that occurred in the fighting arts, the terms may have utility. Broadly speaking, during the course of the fifteenth century, the changing nature of warfare, due to the integration of gunpowder weaponry, propelled changes in armour

\textsuperscript{123} I presented a paper at the 2009 Scientific Congress for Martial Arts and Combat Sports, held in Viseau, Portugal, “Historical and Modern Pedagogies in European Martial Arts,” outlining a methodology for establishing review and testing designed to help validate competing interpretations of historical swordsmanship. Publication is pending in the \textit{Journal for Asian Martial Arts}, 2011.
and tactics that had a dramatic impact on the martial arts of Europe, both in terms of how they were taught and how they were employed.\textsuperscript{124} While I will make this case in the final chapter, I will loosely define the terms “medieval” to discuss the works under consideration here and “Renaissance” to discuss the arts that follow, for the most part after 1500, while the broad period between 1430 and 1500 is perhaps transitional.

In a nutshell, “medieval” martial arts have a stronger emphasis on power and flexibility (creativity) of action, emphasizing the “art,” and are firmly connected into the traditions of chivalric literature and culture. “Renaissance” arts, by contrast, emphasize position and time, and they de-emphasize the foci on power and individual creativity, striving instead for a scientific sense of perfection drawn from the science of geometry. Their philosophical ties are to renaissance humanism, rather than to the chivalric ethos. Also we find in the Renaissance (and thereafter), the “great debate” between the efficacy of the edge and point, completely absent in the medieval arts—not because, as has been asserted, that the medieval arts eschewed the point (they most assuredly did not)—but because everything was considered a weapon—all parts of the weapon, the body, or indeed anything within reach (again, the emphasis on flexibility of response and the preservation of maneuver). The arts are related, but there are substantial changes borne of military and social change.

\textit{Martial Arts, Fighting, and Fencing}

Before delving into the manuscripts, looking at a few definitions are in order. The terms

\footnote{\textsuperscript{124} Remaining cognizant of the debate swirling around the concept of the “military revolution,” first proposed by Michael Roberts in 1955 and later propelled into the mainstream by Geoffrey Parker, I will not here take a position on the cause of the adoption for gunpowder as a source of social change, or to cite the most vocal critics of the theory for the medieval period as so strongly expressed by Kelly DeVries and John Stone. Whatever the cause, the technological component of warfare and violent conflict did undergo significant changes during this period, and these changes will be discussed in successive chapters.}
“marital arts” and “fencing,” are both associated with sport, yet both have applications beyond it—as a group, martial arts have, in the opinion of some writers, applications for self-defense, in or out of a military environment. Fencing, even as it was practiced in the 31pad d’armes for exercise and personal development, also had applications in the duel, for street defense, or in a much more limited sense, on the battlefield.

“Fighting” is more easily understood, and yet more slippery. Certainly some martial arts including fighting, while others are closer to dance, competition, or performance. In English, the word has strong connotations which make translation a potentially difficult issue. The English term comes from the Old German—fechten—and, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is first referenced in Beowulf, as feohtan, in 959 A.D.125 The OED then lists a listing c. 1000, “God …tæceþ handa mine to foehete;” from 1175, “Beoď stronge on fihte;” from 1205, “to-gœdre heo fusden and veht neo bigunnen;” from the very early fourteenth century, “he watz famed for fre Þat feƺt loued best.” We can see in the OED references above strong connections to circumstances where combat was an issue—in Beowulf, in God’s teaching of “mine” hand to fight, in the strength of Beoď, of the fight that began when they came together, and in the renown won through fighting in the last example. These are elements of the earlier warrior ethos that eventually transformed into the chivalric culture in which the martial arts under discussion were formed.

In chivalric literature, various terms for fighting are almost always employed to describe all sorts of knightly encounters, be they friendly jousts, duels, tourneys, battles or sieges, and this is true in English, French, Italian, and in German.

Starting with the Italian, battaglia translates, according to the 1598 dictionary of John

Florio as “a battle” or “a fight.” This is interesting if one recalls that Fiore dei Liberi’s final treatise, now in the Getty collection, is entitled the *Fior di Battaglia*, literally the “flower of battle” or the “flower of fighting.” An alternate word is *combattimento*, which translates to “a fight” or “a combat.”

This term appears at the start of Antionio’s 1531 *Opera Nova per Imparare a Combattere*, and in Achille Marozzo’s 1536 *Opera Nova dell’Arte delle Armi*.

Consider the Italian term *duello*, which Florio offers as “a single combat, or a fight between two.” Simple enough, given the *due* at the beginning of the word. But there is a connotation of one on one here, a combat delineated by some sort of rules. *Battaglia* and *combattimento* have no such suggestion.

Contrast this word with *schermitore*, “a fencer, a skirmisher, a defender, a master of fence.” *Schermo* has very similar meanings, “a fence, a defense, a warde, a shelter.” It is sometimes translated in modern Italian as “to screen.” Note the important connotation of responsive or defensiveness; *schermo* is best translated, perhaps, as a defense, while a *schermitore* teaches or practices self-defense; by contrast, a *combattente* has no defensive connotation—there is an offensiveness to the term absent from the term *schermitore*; similarly

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126 John Florio, *A Worlde of Wordes*, London: Arnold Hatfield, 1598; reprinted New York: Georg Olms, 2004, p. 40. This definition has been to some degree supplanted by the more modern term *combattimento*, according to the *Garzanti Grandi Dizionario Inglese*, [Italy]: Garzanti, 2001, p. 391, which also appears in Florio, p. 77, as “a fight” or “a combat.”


128 Achille Marozzo, *Opera Nova de Achille Marozza Bolognese, mastro generale de l’arte de l’armi*, Modena: 1536. The Bolognese school, to which we may attribute the now-lost treatise of Maestro Filippo (or Lippo) di Bartolomeo Dardi (teaching from 1413-1464), Achille Marozzo, Antonio Manciinolo, the author of the anonymous tract L’Arte della Spada, and Dall’Aggoci, and there are records of masters in Bologna steadily from 1338 onwards: Maestro Rosolino (1338); Maestro Francesco (1354); and Maestro Nerio (1385). See the introduction to the Anonimo Bolognese by Marco Rubboli and Luca Cesari, *L’Arte della Spada: Trattato di Scherma dell’inizio del XVI Secolo*, Rimini: Il Cercico, 2005, and also the excellent apparatus by Francesco Novati, *Flos duellatorum in armis, sine armis, equester, pedester: il Fior di battaglia: testo inedito del 1410*, Bergamo: Istituto Italiano d’Arti Grafiche, 1902.

129 Florio, p. 352.

130 Ibid.
with a comparison between a *schermo* a “screen” or “defense,” and a *battaglia*, a “combat” or “fight.” There is no sense of necessary equality or structure, as in the terms *duellare* or *duello*.

Chivalric figures and men-at-arms are consistently depicted in chronicle, romance, and knightly and princely handbooks as combatants, fighters, knights, men-at-arms, or similar terms. Never are they referred to as fencers; this term seems to occur only in civic records; court rolls, regulations and in some payment records, at least not before 1450 or so.

Fiore dei Liberi refers to his figures as *magistri*, *scolari*, and *zugadore*.

…cunctis ludo armorum intendere uolentibus pedestribus sceu equitibus in domino et optatorum propserum euentum. Cum a primordio iuuentutis naturali ad belicosos actus fuerim inclinatus da, uelut ensis, dagardi nec minus brachii ludendi pedester vel equester: quorum omnium deo dante plenariam notitiam sum adeptus expertorum magistorum exeplis multifarisi et doctrina ytalicher et alamanorum et maxime a magistro Jahane dicto suueno, qui fuit scholaris magistri Nicholai de toblem mexinensis diocesis, ac etiam, a pluribus principibus ducibus marchionibus et comitibus et ab aliis innemerabilibus et locis et prouinciis. Jam uero declinante huius exercisii proposito, ne forte tantum milicie iochalle negligenter deperiret, quod equidem in gueris uel alio quolibet tumult peritis uiris prestantissimum subsidium elargitur, disposui libram conponere prelibate artis concernentem, uarias in eo pingendo figuras et exemplio ponendo; quibus inuasionum modis defensionum et astutis uti possit inspesserit, armiger siue pugil.

…to all those who want to understand the play of weapons on foot or when mounted in order to preserve the own well-being, where God wishes them prosperity in order to fulfill their desires. Having been inclined since early youth with a natural appetite for warlike acts, there arose within me the desire to understand the many skills of this art—with the sword, spear, dagger, and no less the play of arms on foot or on horseback, in all of which, thank God, I captured the full knowledge by means of several examples of expert instructors and the teaching of the Italians and the Germans. Most importantly, from Suvevo, the said Master John, who was the student of Master Nicholas of Toblem, [from] the diocese of Metz, and also [from] many princes, dukes, marquis, and counts from numerous other places and provinces. However, as the desire for such exercise has already begun to decline, and so as not to negligently lose so much experience [won by] the men-at-arms, who provide us in war and in other conflicts with a most valuable service through the experience of expert men, I decided to write a book about the most useful things of this splendid art, placing it in various figures with the examples, [showing the] various methods of attack, defense, and such tricks which can serve the man-at-arms or fighter.131

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Fiore mentions in particular several fighting masters, *magistri*, in Germany, and that he studied also with various nobles in “numerous other places and provinces.” But in order that this valuable knowledge of the art not be lost, he decided to write his book, “about the most useful things in this splendid art…which can serve the man-at-arms *armiger* or fighter *pugil*.

Further, states that this is valuable because the men-at-arms *malicie* do valuable service through their expert knowledge in times of war and other conflict. He is not here discussing dueling, but rather men-at-arms generally.

Filippo Vadi, following in the tradition of Fiore in the years between 1482-87, nonetheless changes certain elements of the system, narrowing the applications by eliminating the grappling and equestrian material, and substantially reducing the armoured work with spear and poleaxe. More tellingly, Fiore’s connection with the ground is jettisoned in favor of *guardie* which are far more forward, thus emphasizing speed over power. This is the mark of a more restricted form of practice which is becoming, but has not yet become, divorced from the battlefield.

Indeed, Vadi copies Fiore’s Prologue almost verbatim, but omits now the references to princes, dukes, counts and knights, substituting instead humanistic references to the muses, and to Mars:

> Avendomi mosso per 34pade34l34 34pade34l quale producea fuori el mio franco animo alieno da ogni viltade nelli mei primi e floridi anni ad acti e cose bellicose: cussì per processo di tempo crescendo in forze et in sapere mi mosse per industria ad volere imparare più arte e modi de ingegno de dicti acti e cose bellicose, come è giuchare di 34pade di lanza di daga e azza. De le qual cose mediante lo aduito de summon idio ne ò acquistato assai bona notitia e questo per pratica experiential e doctrina di molti maestri de varii e diversi paesi amaestrati e docti in perfection in tale arte.¹³²

In the first years of my life I was possessed with a natural aptitude, produced our of my frank heart, untainted by cowardice, towards acts and things of war, such that, while

¹³² Filippo Vadi, *Liber de arte gladiatoria dimicandi*, Biblioteca Nazionale, Rome, Fondo Vittorio Emmanuele, MS 1342, ff. 1r-1v.
growing up and seeking both strength (forze) and knowledge, I strove to learn about the art and methods of the aforesaid acts and things of war, that is, the play of the sword, spear, dagger and poleaxe. Of these things, thanks to God’s help, I acquired the good knowledge of practical experience through the teaching of many masters in many different countries, each teaching the perfection of such art.

Vadi makes no mention of Fiore or the *Flos Duellatorum* from which the paragraph is largely borrowed. Instead, he declares using the usual formula that he has studied in many lands, with many masters. But now, there is no reference to preserving the work for the “valuable service” of “expert men.” Men-at-arms are no longer mentioned.

Instead, throughout the text, Vadi adds new words, *scrimir*, which Florio’s dictionary has as a synonym for the term *schermo* discussed above. The audience has subtly shifted, away from the combatant men-at-arms of the nobility and towards a new, undefined group of “swordsmen,” the *scrimatori*. The art is now transitional between the combatives of the men-at-arms to the blended use of the student, the duelist, and still, to an extent, the soldier. Increasingly in the Italian martial arts, *la scienza* will supplant the emphasis on *arte*, and the swordsman will supplant the man-at-arms.

Romance literature in Italian is difficult, since the works of the thirteenth century were largely written in Occitan or Provençal, and so are of little linguistic use. However, during the fourteenth century in particular, chronicles begin to appear in Tuscan, and I have found no trace of the terms *schermo* or any of its variations in the texts of Villani, Boccaccio, or Dante.

Starting with French, the “language of chivalry,” as it is sometimes known, we find within Froissart the term *combattere*, and *si combatter*, but we don’t see *escrime*; the earliest reference I have been able to find is c. 1460.

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133 Ibid, for example on ff. 3v and 4r.
134 Florio, p. 359.
The German word *fechten* may be translated either as “fighting” or as “fencing.” But the modern connotation for the word is potentially very different from its historical context, carrying suggestions influenced by the modern sport—the restricted targets, the fencing strip (“piste”), and ultra-thin fencing foil itself.

Alongside the linguistic considerations, the essentially defensive character of civilian fighting, as we will see in the next chapter with the Royal Armouries MS I.33, carrying through with the *schulfechten* commented upon by the master Johannes Liechtenauer, examined in chapter 4, distinguish the civilian arts from the military. Notwithstanding, as we will discuss in chapter 6, the close relationship of the weapon performance characteristics in the civilian and military weapons of the medieval period suggest a much closer relationship in the sense of governing principles than are found after c. 1475, when dramatic battlefield changes and met with equally dramatic changes in civil society. By this time, the distinction between military and civilian weaponry becomes much more clear, and we may usefully and comfortably begin to discuss fencing. Certainly, the fencing arts of the late fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries did not spring whole-cloth from a vacuum, but prior, the close technological, and perhaps cultural, connections between military and civilian arms were closer.

In order to better establish the idea of what medieval martial arts were like, I suggest that it is better to use the term “fencing” to apply to the civilian tradition of self-defense that properly begins with the evolution of the specialized weapon—the rapier—first known as the *espada robera*, but even this use dates to the first years of the fifteenth century.

For our purposes, it is useful to connect the rise of “fencing” with a specialized weapon, the civilian dueling sword. The rapier found little use on the battlefield, and it’s more specialized
application closely boxed in its use to a specific set of known parameters, bounded and
encouraged by social changes that encouraged civilian dueling.

But what of the term “martial arts?” No historical works that I have seen have hazarded a
definition, but anthropologists have. But even within anthropology, reaching a consensus on a
definition has proven elusive. Eschewing most explanatory definitions, David E. Jones offers
what he terms a multi-part “syndrome-type” definition:

*Kata:* This Japanese concept identifies a prearranged, or choreographed, activity in which
the basic techniques of a certain fighting style are acted out by one or up to hundreds of
participants. The *Kata* can look almost like dancing, and the link between fighting
behavior and dancing is significant.

Emphasis on Shock Combat: Martial arts stress hand-to-hand combat, although long
distance techniques—bow and arrow, rock-throwing, and slinging—may also be integral
to a martial arts system. Because of the close fighting, the use of hands and feet is
emphasized in most martial arts.

Ritual: Ritual indicates a repeated, highly stylized behavior, generally of a religious or
political nature, that may be incorporated into a martial art. For example, in Polynesian
martial behavior, one finds appeals to lineage and community gods for success in battle.

Technique, repetition, and drill: Without continual practice of basic techniques, one will
not develop the strength, flexibility, or automatic response needed to attain and maintain
the technique effective in combat.

Sparring: All martial arts include some form of sparring behavior which provides a
transition between the formal practice of fighting techniques and true battlefield
conditions. Sparring is not intended to kill but to practice deadly techniques somewhat
controlled by rules.

Entertainment: Some of the best martial artists in the world now find themselves to be
movie stars. Not a modern concept, the entertainment component of martial arts has long
been in evidence in the “folk operas” of China, the entertainment-oriented public
demonstrations of various martial arts, “Samurai” novels, and contemporary television
series.

Seeking internal power: Most martial arts have an animistic component, a belief that a
force in the universe can, if awakened and harnessed, shape an even stronger, healthier,
faster, and more perceptive fighter. In Polynesia great warriors were believed to have
much *mana*. In Japan the term is *ki*, and in China it is *chi*.
Ranking and indications of rank: In some cases ranking is based entirely on seniority, and in others, on blatant fighting prowess. Rank is denoted by colored belts or ceremonial outfits, badges, or special insignia.

Connection with social elites: The upper classes in all societies have tended to be skillful fighters and military leaders. In Medieval Europe, for example, only the wealthy could afford the armour, weaponry, and horses of a knight. Although martial arts are most typically associated with the upper classes, oppressed peoples have developed fighting styles. For example, the Kobudo of Okinawa arose from the use of farming tools to resist occupation by the heavily armed and skilled Japanese Samurai. Bataille Bois of Trinidad and Tobago is based in the fighting arts of African slaves, as is Brazilian Capoeira. In Japan some martial arts are practiced exclusively by farmers.  

Certainly, we might take issue with some of Jones’ categories. For example, practice of the martial arts in modern American society, and in many societies around the world, cannot easily be equated with social elites. In many cases, the opposite is now true, with combat arts schools found in many inner-city areas. Similarly, many martial arts, such as Tai Chi, do not rely much upon sparring. In American “mixed heritage” dojos, the vast majority of instruction is kata-based, and in many cases, sparring is wholly optional. But overall, Jones’ “syndrome-type” definition seems to have been met with general acceptance within the field of anthropology, so it provides a useful starting point. In the chapters that follow, keeping this definition in mind as we describe three systems from medieval Europe, keeping these aspects in mind may help to establish the presence or distinctions in how at least anthropologists see the martial arts.

But from the historian’s point of view, the “slush” style of definition is much less satisfactory. Sydney Anglo, for example, boldly entitled his 1998 work *The Martial Arts of Renaissance Europe*. Without question a *magnum opus*, Anglo went to considerable lengths to place the arts within the context of their societies and to demonstrate their systematic nature and lineal connectivity. Starting with the ideas of *sapience* and *prudence* that he finds in Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, he quickly traces this same issue to a favorite of his, the fencing master cited

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by Baldassare Castiglione in the *Book of the Courtier*, Pietro Monte. And finding within Monte an articulate concern for the interrelation of theory and practice, he feels justified in using the term “martial arts” to describe the object of his survey:

Many masters at arms shared the this view of the intimate interrelation between theory and practice; and it is largely because of their endeavors to give some sort of permanence to their ideas that we are able to attempt a reconstruction of a very important but relatively little-studied subject in the history of ideas—the martial arts of renaissance Europe…But it is still necessary to establish the martial arts within the broader contexts of intellectual, military, and art history while establishing more precisely what these activities were, and how they were systematized.136

For Anglo it was thus the systematic nature of the military or pseudo-military arts that defined themselves as arts, and, as we will see in chapter 5, this thinking is in line with the historical conceptualization of art as bounded in governing principle. Over the next few chapters, I will follow Anglo, using a horizontal comparative methodology to balance the evolutionary progressive approach that characterizes histories of fencing, attempting to put the medieval martial arts into their cultural and historical context.

Methodology

Over the next three chapters I examine three surviving treatises. The first dates from c. 1295, and its Latin is relatively clear and has been ably translated by Geoffrey L. Forgeng. It is a civilian treatise, jarringly presenting its combatants in sacerdotal robes, glossing an older mnemonic verse and extending the existing system with modifications made by the authors in their rich commentary.

The next dates from 1389, and discusses the work of Johannes Liechtenauer, the influential “father” of a German martial arts tradition that continued for nearly three hundred

years. Despite its lack of images, the text is exceptionally valuable because the commentary is near to, or perhaps contemporary with, Liechtenauer himself, and because it explicitly considers the crucial mental aspects of the fight, which later commentators in the German tradition largely avoid.

Finally, we spend extra time with the manuscript I have worked most with, the 1409-20 collection by Fiore dei Liberi, the Friulian master. Fiore’s work presents a polished blend of professional rendered illustrations with relatively clear explanatory paragraphs that cover all aspects of combat, from grappling through the use of the dagger, sword, stick, and polearm, in and out of armour, on foot and on horseback. In Fiore we can see the clearest expression of principle carried across weapon-forms, but many of the core principles are expressed only as subtext.

This problem of subtext defines the difficulties faced both by previous generations of fencing historians and practitioners. Even interpreting meaning from the written sections and the visual representations is difficult, since artistic convention (especially in the case of RA MS I.33) and linguistic ambiguity define all three. For this reason, my approach has been to employ a comparative textual, thematic analysis, looking for internal themes that cross reference between the three. Given the difficulties and limitations of an exclusively philological or historical approach, I have approached my analysis with the advice of the historian Francesco Novati firmly in mind: I have leveraged the tools of kinesiology and experimental archaeology to continually test my interpretations, both from the biomechanical perspective—assuming that efficiency is a desired end-state for a combat system. These theoretical and “sword in hand” explorations have been undertaken over a broad period spanning more than a decade, with twice- or more weekly sessions amounting to some 3500+ hours within the practice hall, and countless
more hours in the academic world. Hopefully, my analysis will provide some illumination on these nearly lost martial arts of medieval Europe.
CHAPTER 2

RA MS I.33 AND THE TRADITION OF MARTIAL VERSE¹: DEFENSE FOR THE
GENERALIS WITH SWORD AND BUCKLER

It may be observed that in general all combatants [dimicatores], or all men
holding a sword in hand, even if they are ignorant of the art of combat
[artem dimicatoriam], use these seven guards, concerning which we have
seven verses.

--Anonymous

Overview

The first reference to the art of combat—Europe’s martial art—is found in the oldest
known surviving fighting treatise and is popularly known as “one thirty-three” after its catalogue
number at the Royal Armouries collection at Leeds, where it is now preserved.² Here it is termed
artem dimicatoriam,³ and it is presently dated at or just before the very dawn of the fourteenth
century.⁴ It offers a sophisticated system of self-defense with predominantly civilian arms: the
sword and buckler (a small shield, denoted in the manuscript’s Latin as scutum). The treatise
features a priest (sacerdotus) and a student (scolaris). These two figures execute sequences of

¹ The manuscript is known now as “one” thirty-three, although many interpreters and scholars mistakenly
refer to it as “eye” thirty three. The name comes from the naming scheme at the British Royal Armouries at Leeds.
The “I” in the “I.33” notation represents a Roman numeral, not the capital letter I. Dr. Forgeng has proposed that the
manuscript by known as the Walpurgis Manuscript in honor of the only woman found in any treatise, but this has
not met with wide acceptance and some students of the manuscript in Europe have begun to refer to it as the
Lutegerus Manuscript. Because neither of these names is applied universally, I will employ the more well-known
moniker “I.33” throughout.

² Modern students of the medieval martial arts are permanently indebted to the work of Jeffrey L. Forgeng,
whose translation and supporting apparatus for the work have provided a solid foundation for interpretative studies.
The technical reconstruction of the treatise is exceptionally difficult, clouded as it is by the nature of the descriptions
and the sometimes ambiguous character of the illustrations. Among those modern students whose work should be
noted is that of Robert Holland, David Rawlings, Sean Hayes, Stephen Hand and Paul Wagner. Of these, I am most
familiar with and most indebted to the work of Dr. Holland, whose decade of dedication to the manuscript has
yielded an interpretation that is smooth, efficient, and powerful. In addition, Dr. Holland should receive the credit
for highlighting the importance of the experience of the “common fighter” brought out in the I.33 verse. The
interpretative work by David Rawlings is also very highly regarded, particularly in Europe, while the preliminary
work by Hand and Wagner laid the foundation for many diverse interpretations.

³ Jeffrey L. Forgeng, The Medieval Art of Swordsmanship: A Facsimile and Translation of Europe’s Oldest
Personal Combat Treatise, Royal Armouries MS. I.33, Union City, Calif.: Chivalry Bookshelf, 2003 (Hereafter,
MAS), p. 20-1, plate 2.

⁴ Anglo, p. 22. See also Forgeng, MAS, p. 2.
guards, counters and remedies to the counters marked off with crosses that delineate each section. Notably, the Latin text accompanying the figures offers detailed instructions and variations not shown in the illustrations alone and the level of description is amazing for the period.\(^5\) Also important is the inclusion of technical German terms sprinkled throughout, presumably where no Latin analogue was known. The use of verse transmission and a mnemonic organization harken strongly to the scholastic tradition in European, and especially German education.\(^6\) The inclusion of vernacular terms suggests a strong connection with popular martial culture, defining a tradition for the use and teaching of weapons in a civilian context that will form an important component of the more refined martial art that will develop during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

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\(^5\) I have in my possession original high-resolution photographs of the original manuscript courtesy of the Trustees of the Royal Armouries at Leeds, but have for the most part worked from the extremely useful translation and facsimile of the manuscript presented by Dr. Jeffrey L. Forgeng, cited above.

\(^6\) See especially the work of Robert Black, *Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy: Tradition and Innovation from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Centuries*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Although this superb work deals with the intricacies of how learning was conducted in Italy, of necessity Dr. Black compares the Italian experience with what was being done on the other side of the Alps. For another recent work dealing with England, see Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Schools from Roman Britain to Renaissance England*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006.
One of the strikingly unique elements in the manuscript is that a single woman, later named Walpurgis, is featured late in the manuscript, and she has a special guard, one not dissimilar from the posta di donna guard found in Fiore dei Liberi’s later work. With respect to Walpurgis herself, it has been pointed out that Saint Walpurgis (c. 710-777) had a strong association with Württemberg, where the manuscript was long associated, as she became abbess of both the convent at Heidenheim (located in Württemberg), ruling over it and, following her brother’s death, over the monastery as well. She was widely believed to be the first woman author, as she was strongly educated and wrote of St. Willibald’s travels in Palestine in Latin.

Insofar as the manuscript records, for the first time in Latin, a vernacular tradition, perhaps her association is appropriate. Within the text, she is introduced without fanfare on plate sixty-seven, clothed in a kind of kirtle with close-fitting sleeves, her head bare and the sword snugged tightly to her right shoulder, her left foot forward, presumably to encourage a full rotation of the hips in order to maximize power through the turning of her body. Indeed, the name Walpurgis is not even inserted until the next plate (the last in the manuscript), where the word sacerdos is cancelled (using small dots below the word) and her name inserted above, suggesting some confusion among the team who produced the manuscript.

Another important distinction from all later manuscripts, which feature combatants armed at least in foundational clothing suitable for wear under armour, if not in armour itself, is the presentation of the priest and scholar wear sacerdotal robes reminiscent of many illustrations within the work of Matthew Paris. Other depictions of sword and buckler play show combatants

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7 This similarity is commented upon by Dr. Forgeng in his introduction to the work, but I find it very intriguing that such “woman’s guard” exists within the tradition separated by more than a hundred years and across linguistic lines.


9 Indeed, a comparison of Paris’ work to the I.33 manuscript has not yet been attempted, but even a cursory look confirms a striking similarity in techniques of illustration and indeed with the hand of Paris himself. Active
wearing standard civilian clothing, not arming clothes worn as a foundation under armour. There are, as is mentioned in the previous chapter, at least two known depictions of clerics bearing weapons with their robes. Perhaps it is no accident that the first commentator on the great German master, Johannes Liechtenauer, was a priest by the name of Hanko Döbringer, whose sophisticated combat analysis strongly argues for a martial background. The cathedral-school atmosphere, with the priest and scholar, the sacerdotal robes, the scholastic form of commentary, followed by the obvious martial expertise of Döbringer, combined with evidence for the going about of armed clerks, all suggests a tolerance if not a tradition for martial sport cum art around the clerical community.10 It is indeed possible that the cathedral school, with its focus on the education of lay persons, found itself also a host to martial exercises and sports, not unlike the earliest references to the game of tennis, which were often played on cathedral grounds. By tolerating and perhaps hosting practice sessions for priests or laity, the activity could both be monitored and opportunities could be found for reaching the laity with God’s message.11

between 1235 and 1259, Paris’ work includes a broadly surviving corpus that has been compared to the work of John de Celia. The lettering and the draping of the fabric in particular bear a strong resemblance, as do the treatments of face and limbs. The “tinted drawing” style was more predominant during the first half of the thirteenth century, and the more rounded figures presented in the manuscript are also indicative of the first half of the century rather than later. However, dating the manuscript by the figures alone is risky, since it could well have been produced by an artist trained decades previously and working in the style he knew well. It seems far more likely that the scribe and illustrator for I.33 was trained in the same tradition as Paris, than for Paris to have any direct relationship to the manuscript. Still, the striking comparisons may set a foundation for potentially moving the date of the manuscript’s origin back as much as forty years, perhaps to somewhere closer to c. 1260, rather than c.1295. Certainly, I am for the most part comfortable with the 1295 dating offered by Forgeng, but the possibility of an earlier dating is food for thought and emphasizes continuity of tradition.

10 There is additional evidence for such a practice, at least on the Iberian Peninsula, in the records of visitations from the fourteenth century. Michelle Armstrong-Partida has found numerous instances of practice using sword and buckler not only on church grounds, but in the church itself, practiced by active monks. See her paper delivered at the 2011 American Historical Association conference in Boston, “Dangerous Liaisons: Nuns, Monks, and the Sexual Indiscretions of Monastic Life.” Dr. Armstrong-Partida included such instances as an illustrated for other kinds of transgressions common to the monastic community, but concluded that these were obvious breeches of monastic discipline. While such instances were accompanied with a minor fine, no other action was taken as a result of the visitation, leading one to conclude that such ludic activity was perhaps far more common than is often supposed. There would be nothing to be gained for the clerical establishment to record such instances, as they were outside the rules, which may account for the lack of additional references.

11 Dr. Anglo concludes the opposite in his Martial Arts of Renaissance Europe, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000, (hereafter MARE) p.22, concluding that it was unlikely that any sustained martial activity
Apart from the unique elements, the treatise presents a highly sophisticated martial art built around a kernel of a verse detailing seven guards (custodiae) and a set of counters (46bsession), a flowing set of responses that resemble an algorithmic, tactical decision tree presented in Latin interspaced with German names. This inclusion of German names is important, because it implies the existence of a technical language in the vernacular that describes principles, specific situations, or actions. Further, the presentation of the combat as revolving around guards, counters and remedies to the counters evokes the same approach presented in virtually all other surviving martial arts treatises from all the manuscripts under consideration. We see the same approach in the long lineage of the German kunst des fechten as well as in the works of Fiore dei Liberi and even into the anonymous Burgundian poleaxe treatise, the Jeu de la Hache. Such an approach continued into the era of classical fencing and it characterizes the martial arts of Europe throughout the period.

Even more to the point, woven in throughout the manuscript is strong evidence for the existence of an enduring tradition of instructional verse in the martial arts. The author seems to have built his personal variant on the martial art around the kernel of an accepted, pre-existing mnemonic verse, what I am referring to as the “kernel” verse. He cites and appeals to the verse as an authority, while using it to frame the art he teaches. In a real sense, it could be seen that the I.33 treatise is merely a highly skilled gloss or commentary on a vernacular teaching verse surrounded clerical property. This seems like a solid conclusion, except for the new information concerning the evidence found in visitations, recorded below.

12 The difficulty in interpreting this system has created great divisions of opinion by interpreters. Part of the problem arises from the seemingly random inclusion of repeated positions or elements of verse, and part of it probably stems from the fact that the system appears to be an effort by a respected teacher to teach local students based on an oral verse, but the teacher adds his own rich variations. The resulting system is presented with far less clarity than are the later German or Italian systems. Even the eminent Dr. Anglo, writing on p. 45 in MARE, characterized the underlying system as hard to interpret because “…leg and foot positions are wholly stylized: and this, together with the stereotyping of the postures, their ambiguity and with regard to the direction of blows, and the inadequacies of the verbal commentary, makes it difficult to reconstruct more than a general notion of the combat techniques depicted.”
designed to preserve it, perhaps for use around the cathedral school itself, and giving special insights on where the skilled sacerdotus offers a different response based on his superior knowledge of the art. Within the German tradition, such zettel or teaching verse finds a permanent place and the verse of Johannes Liechtenauer is passed down and commented upon for nearly two hundred years, forming the backbone for the kunst des fechten that was the German school.

Finally, the overall system of defense presented in I.33 approaches the problem of self-defense as an art in the Aristotelian sense of the world. Rather than offering rigid prescriptions that are sought in later “scientific” approaches, the authors instead seek to present enduring combat principles that may be exercised with creativity. The strongly ludic character of the manuscript has been rightly emphasized by Dr. Forgeng in his analysis of the work as well as by those trying to reconstruct the system itself with sword in hand. Just as tournaments and feats of arms exercised knightly combatants in the saddle and within the lists, similarly ludic sword and buckler play was well known throughout the later Middle Ages and probably provided a parallel form of practical training. We shall revisit this tradition as we attempt to place the manuscript in context near the end of this chapter.

Sword and Buckler

A buckler is a small shield, not normally carried by the knightly combatants. Claude Blair, the doyen of arms and armour studies, defined a buckler thus:

The buckler, [was] small and equipped with a cross-bar inside by means of which it was gripped. It was often concave towards the front and equipped with a hollow spiked boss at the centre. From the beginning it seems to have been designed exclusively as an adjunct to the sword for use other than the field of battle. It was carried by civilians as a defense against highway-robbers, and also by body-guards. The earliest form of scientific fencing seems to have been devised for the sword and buckler, which remained the usual
weapons of the duelist until supplanted by the rapier and dagger in the second half of the 16th century.  

Certainly bucklers were in wide use during the thirteenth century, and it is probable that they descended from the rounded shields of the Anglo Saxons and other Germanic peoples. Guy Laking shows several examples, one from the Cotton mss. Cleop. C.8, now in the British Library and the surviving fragments then resident in the National Museum of Antiquities at Edinburgh.  

Laking, alongside Charles Cosson and Francis Henry Criss-Day, was perhaps the greatest student of physical culture of arms and armour in the nineteenth century, and it is perhaps curious that little attention is given to the buckler in Laking’s magisterial five-volume *Record of European Arms and Armour*, saving for a very brief treatment of just two sentences in a history of nearly fifteen hundred pages,

In dealing with auxiliary defense furnished by shields in use during the XVth century, it must be borne in mind that the circular shield, rondache, rondel, boce, or buckler was still in constant use, and had indeed continued to be used from the Saxon times in which we have first taken note of them.  

Laking did, however, use iconographic evidence to date buckler use to the thirteenth century, citing frescoes in the old Westminster Palace, offering also effigy of an unknown knight from the Great Malvern Church, Worcesthershire, and including, “In the small form of the ‘boce’ these shields figure continuously in the pictures and illuminations of the XIVth and XVth centuries.”  

It would appear that during the thirteenth century, the buckler or small round shield was employed by some military men. The aforementioned effigy in the Great Malvern Church, as well as a carved military figure on the front of Rheims Cathedral both show bucklers used by

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15 Ibid., p. 242.
16 Ibid.
fully-armoured men-at-arms. The Great Malvern Church figure wears characteristic fully encompassing armour of mail, including a full helm, while the Rheims figure wears scale and has a stylized casque. Both are the full panoply of a knight or man-at-arms, rather than of a non-fighting cleric or townsman. Indeed, David Edge and John Miles Paddock conclude that the buckler was used by infantrymen, particularly English infantry, for some time, “It [a shield] was used only by infantrymen who carried small bucklers (round shields) which were used in conjunction with swords, a style of fighting which survived in England well into the Elizabethan period.”

As Laking and Blair wrote, iconographic sources for men-at-arms bearing bucklers abound. A final, representative depiction of the buckler must be mentioned, however, in the Holkham Picture Bible, where the “great and the common” are shown in their respective spheres, fighting one another. This work dates from 1327-40 and is done in the Matthew Paris style of bold drawing accented by tincture to give the effect of color without coloring the whole illustration. In the upper panel, Edward III fights for his Crown. The knights bear more traditional ‘heater’-shaped shields, flat across the top and pointed towards the knee. In the lower panel, infantry are shown in mixed combat, *Coment le commoune genz, checon levera acontre autre et voudra accire por le aver, par mestrise….*, or “How the common people rise against one another and kill their fellows for what they have, through avarice.” What is perhaps more interesting about the illustration is that it depicts the second guard we find in our I.33 manuscript

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17 This figure is illustrated in David Edge and John Miles Paddock, *Arms and Armour of the Medieval Knight*, New York: Bison Books, 1988, p. 41. While published by a mass-market press, this work is excellent and represents the last major survey publication on the physical culture of arms and armour in English. Given the scale armour and the casque-style helmet, it is probable that this figure is meant to represent a Byzantine or Moorish combatant, although his sword is straight, which reduces the appeal of the claim.
18 Ibid., p. 121.
19 British Library Additional MSS. 47682, fol. 40r.
21 Ibid, p. 86.
almost exactly, as well as the third guard (although the combatant is armed with a hand-axe rather than a sword). Because of the high-quality color rendering of the illustration, we can tell that the buckler material may be painted and that iron reinforces may have been fairly common—something that will be seen on the surviving buckler recently discovered below.

Other sources include one found in the *Romance of Alexander*, dating from circa 1400, where two youngsters appear to play at sword and buckler.22 Elsewhere in the same manuscript, in the marginalia of fol. 204r, another man-at-arms or perhaps even a civilian stands at his ease with his sword and buckler.23 The fourteenth century clerical encyclopedia, the *Omne Bonum*, includes several references that extend the use of the buckler well beyond England. This is most interesting, since it features clerics going so-armed, and it features the caption, *clerici pugnantes in duello*, where three bear swords and two also have bucklers.24

More recently, I have discovered in an out-of-the-way display in Amsterdam, a surviving example.25 The buckler is nearly perfectly preserved, and, when compared to the one illustrated in the I.33 treatise, is a near-perfect match. Like those in the treatise, where the central boss is lighter colored than the rest of the shield, the central boss is made of iron, and it has a central handle of poplar that allows a loose, but secure grip by sliding the hand into the boss area. The wooden base is of willow, and has beautiful iron reinforces around the edges and protruding on the compass points towards the center, each point ending in iron leafwork reminiscent of that appearing on contemporary cabinet hinges. The conservators believe it was once covered with either leather or linen, probably held in place by the iron rimwork. This is a unique surviving

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22 *Romance of Alexander*, Oxford, Bodleian fol. 264, f.61v
23 Ibid., fol. 204r.
24 *Omne Bonum*, Fol. 302v, sec. 9.
25 Now in the Amsterdam Historical Museum, accession number NDK-1237-1. Images used with permission of the AHM and Frans Oehlen. Sadly, much detail about the shield is not available in the museum’s catalog, such as the buckler’s weight, the thickness of the willow, or any details about fabric or leather fragments which may have survived around the iron attachment points.
artifact, one that compliments the many surviving swords from this period, allowing experimental archeologists and martial arts historians the ability to reproduce it, further enhancing the authenticity of the thriving interpretation community.

Looking to the legal record, Sydney Anglo and Joseph Strutt endeavored to learn about the tradition of masters-at-arms teaching martial arts. They both found a tradition of sword and buckler schools operating in London. These schools and inn-yard teachers were in no way affiliated with the chivalric classes—knights did not go to London or to York to learn the combative arts. In fact, quite the opposite is true. Students and buckler players were associated with the red-light riff-raff of London, provoking statutes against their brawling, rioting and peace-disturbing activities as early as 1285, “As fools who delight in their folly do learn to fence with the buckler, and thereby are encouraged in their follies, it is provided that none shall keep a school for, nor teach the art of fence within the City of London under pain of imprisonment for forty days.” However, such teachers as Robert le Skirmisour (imprisoned in 1311) and Philip Treher (noted as a teacher for a defendants in judicial duels in 1446 and 1453) seem to have continued to thrive, as there are many court cases in London attesting to not only the survival of the use of bucklers amongst encounters in the streets but with occasional references to the men who taught the arts both informally and in a more organized school setting. Add to these the aforementioned visitation records, and the largely unmined body of court records from Italy and Germany, and it should not be surprising to find that men with the “sword and buckler” were often to be found at the heart of public disturbances, but men so-armed would also have been very likely the first to defend the local community, since they possessed sufficient arms.

27 Anglo, MARE, p. 8.
In literature, there are scattered references to the use of sword and buckler. Chaucer presents his Yeoman as carrying a buckler, in addition to his sword and bow:

A YEMEN hadde he and servantz namo
   At that tyme, for hym liste ride so.
   
   ...  
   Upon his arm he baar a gay bracer,
   And by his syde a swerd and bokeler,²⁸

Indeed, the Middle English dictionary offers a plethora of listings, including many by Chaucer, where he uses the buckler to paint his pictures of the pilgrims and those in the stories conveyed, suggesting that the buckler was a common reference point in terms both of shape and size.²⁹ He compares both a hat and a broach, once for general information and the other as a form of mockery.

Other interesting listings from the Middle English Dictionary include one that specifically mentions priests bearing bucklers, from a tract entitled Why were, dating from 1387-95: “Thise wantoune prests..gon wid swerd and bokeler, as men that wolde fihte.”³⁰ Another citation appears in the Calendar of Coroner’s rolls, “William de Northhamptone and..Richard de Bulkele, boklerplaiers.”³¹ Another buckler player is mentioned in the Rolls of Parliament, in 1381, where Johannes Turnour, Herde, Boclerplaier de Stistede.”³² They mention the Dream Book, from c. 1400, “Gladiatores. To seen men playin at the bokeleer and with hem playe bittoknith gret angwysh.”³³ From Gamelyn, c. 1350, the teaching of the art is mentioned, “I wil teche þe a play 52te bokeler.”³⁴ In a poem by Minot, þare lered men þe Normandes at buckler to

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³⁰ Ibid.
³¹ Ibid.
³² Ibid.
³³ Ibid.
³⁴ Ibid.
play." In 1425, from the Medulla, Gladiatur[a]: Bokeler pleynge." In the Shillingford, there is a reference to the defensive character of the buckler play, which underscores its connection distinct from the aggressive chivalric culture, “That we…ever stoned yn defence, as a bokeler player, and smyte never.” There is even a reference to a trade for the making of such shields in the Handwerkernamen, circa 1368, “75: Bucklermaker” and in the Wills of York, “Omnes clavi mei, vocati buclermayle.”

The use of the term “playing” is important, but it should not be construed solely as a sporting activity. Rather, play should be considered, as Jeffrey L. Forgeng has asserted, in its ludic meaning—in other words, as a method of training. For example, the play of kittens is considered “ludic,” because it is done with a playful, mostly friendly demeanor, yet it trains the kittens for the real contests they will face as adults in hunting and defending territory. Sword and buckler “play” is meant in the same way, just as medieval tournaments were wargames intended to exercise knights in the combat tactics necessary to keep mounted horsemen in close order organization under the charge and immediately thereafter. Similarly, sword and buckler “play” taught real skills that might one day be important on the road, during a raid or robbery, or in a war. Men (and perhaps some women) trained themselves to apply general principles through the creative experience of competition. We thus have something of a clue about how medieval men trained for war, using ludic activities—wargames—to prepare themselves physically and mentally for the challenges of combat. Such realistic preparation would not be out of place in a

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35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 For the use of tournaments as training for war, see Juliet Barker: The Tournament in England, 1100-1400, Woodbridge: UK, 1986; Richard Barber and Juliet Barker, Tournaments: Jousts, Chivalry, and Pageants in the Middle Ages. New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989. There is a great literature on this topic, but very little has been written since the 1989 publication of Tournaments.
modern military training regimen, where wargames are used to integrate technical skills, tactics, logistics, communications, leadership and other operational elements of the combat arts. It would not be going too far to think of such sword and buckler play, like the chivalric feats of arms of the knights, as a wargame, practiced to convey physical conditioning—strengthening both body and spirit—entertainment, and reputation. In a predominantly local society this reputation for strength in arms could have been an important deterrent to all sorts of unwanted violence, not only for one’s self, but for family members who could also rely on the possibility of assistance or vendetta-style retribution. In this way, the civilian sense of reputation for skill fearsomeness would have paralleled the knight’s renown and the benefits would have been similar.

In the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, martial games and sports, such as sword and buckler fighting, were thought as beneficial to the health of both body and spirit. In the popular *Tacinum Sanitatis*, a Latin translation of the Arabic *Taqwim al-sihha*, exercises of the body are depicted that include exercise with the sword and buckler. It is perhaps amazing to discover that Martin Luther himself recommended sword-play as exercise, alongside jousting and wrestling. While this idea builds on the longstanding idea of strength of will and the strength of character going hand-and-hand in developing a man’s character, expanded in Ramon Lull’s *Book of Knighthood and Chivalry*, it is on one hand perhaps not too surprising to see Luther espousing strengthening and conditioning for the body that supports a Christian mind.

We find, within the holdings of the British Library, two more illuminations of such playful sword and buckler activity. The first, in Royal MS 14 E III, shows a pair of combatants engaged in what seems to be a friendly exchange with sword and buckler. There are even

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41 *Tacinum Sanitatis*, Roma, Biblioteca Casanatense, ms. 459.
musicians playing alongside. A second, also in Royal, this time MS 20, does not feature the musicians, but does feature a pair engaged in a very similar combat.

From the evidence, it would seem that a long tradition of sword and buckler exercises was not uncommon during at least the thirteenth century and into the early fifteenth. It is likely that it goes back into the eleventh. There is a good chance that this activity, despite the disapproval of some authorities such as the City of London and the ecclesiastical author of the Omne Bonum, such activity may well have flourished at some cathedral schools or even within monastic environments. At cathedral schools, the health benefits, exemplified in the Tacinum Sanitatis, could be compounded by hosting a popular (and potentially profitable?) activity within church grounds which would make the cathedral the locus of activity and give the clerics a chance to influence the behavior of those who might not otherwise come into reach, just as the early hosting of tennis matches might have accomplished a similar goal. It certainly flourished despite official efforts to sanction it in London, Paris, in the Italian and German cities.

While we know that men practiced the sport, there is also the possibility that women practiced it as well. The inclusion of the figure of a woman in the RA MS I.33 treatise, alongside clerical debate about the participation of women in “war-like” activities, suggests that at least some did willingly participate, quite apart from those poor souls drawn into war and crime as victims against their will.

Churchmen not only participated but may have taught the art, either as retired soldiers or as a martial arts activity of their own. It may well be that the importance of I.33 lies in its place as the first instance in Europe where a martial art was formally organized and an attempt made to preserve and teach it. In so doing, the three scribes, the artist, and the clerics who worked on the

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44 Anonymous, Estoire del Saint Graal, La Queste del Saint Graal, Morte Artu, British Library Royal 14 E III, fol. 140.
45 British Library Royal MS 20 D VI, fol. unknown.
I.33 manuscript helped to crystallize a fully-fledged martial art from the amorphous stuff of popular practice. Similar efforts will be made by Johannes Liechtenauer and his followers over the course of more than two hundred years; by the Italian sword-master Fiore dei Liberi; and by others as the process accelerated during the course of the fifteenth century.

This tradition of a civilian martial art with sword and buckler reaches back certainly into the thirteenth century and perhaps earlier. We find whimsical marginalia depicting sword and buckler players produced in England, France and in Italy throughout the early fourteenth and into the fifteenth century. In Italy, its presence alongside other exercises strongly reinforces the illustration in the Lombardic version of the *Tacinum Sanitiatu*, where the ludic character of such martial exercises was recommended. Just as pages and squires trained for war in a whole host of martial games that included the béhourd, so too could civilians have trained in ludic exchanges and competitions designed to hone body, spirit and reputation. As in martial arts instruction today, few of these children would need to call upon the acquired physical skills, but some would grow to become men-at-arms or would find themselves in desperate situations where skill at arms would prove invaluable. While the brawling and violence that could arise as a by-product from such training was decried by civil officials, the mental, physical and potentially even the spiritual benefits gained seems to have ensured that the martial art continued from as early as the eleventh or twelfth century through the sixteenth.

The Royal Armouries RA MS I.33 Manuscript

It is now time to turn our attention to the earliest known fighting treatise known to survive, the so-called “I.33” manuscript now resident at the library of the Royal Armouries at Leeds. I will review in turn the physical manuscript, the arms, armour and clothing depicted, the
techniques shown, and finally, the art of fighting with the sword and buckler both from the
perspectives of the “common fighter” and the “priestly” expert responsible for the gloss. While
the anonymous author attempted to convey the complex but sharply effective responses made by
the Priest, he also illuminated, however unintentionally, something of the older art upon which
the Priest’s play was based. While the Priests’ special responses are interesting, they seem to
represent a dead-end in the evolution of the martial art, since they were not picked up in later
German or Italian iterations, but the underlying approaches and principles are consistent
throughout the arts of Johannes Liechtenauer and Fiore dei Liberi, which we shall examine in
later chapters. Therefore, I will emphasize these elements of the treatise and I will draw parallels
with other iconographic references to demonstrate that the treatise was not merely a unique
expression but was rather representative of how people fought with the buckler in the context of
civilian ludic play and infantry combat. Because these parallels can be drawn, I.33 represents a
unique and valuable glimpse into the system of martial arts employed by the lower orders, and it
should therefore enjoy a much more prominent place in the evidence considered when medieval
military historians discuss infantry fighting.

I examined the manuscript in 2003 when at the Royal Armouries to finalize arrangements
for our facsimile translation of the treatise by Dr. Jeffrey L. Forgeng. It consists entirely of just
thirty-two leaves of parchment, about 11.8” x 9”, all sewn into a disappointing binding of
cardboard and paper. It is known to have been in the Gotha ducal library, and the Gotha shelf
mark remains. That the treatise survives is something of a miracle; to obvious shelf wear must
be added the “doodles” that have defaced a number of the figures, most likely done by a

46 Jeffrey L. Forgeng, MAS. It is this fine color facsimile edition and Dr. Forgeng’s excellent translation
that I will cite throughout.
47 Codex Membr. 1.115.
youngster. In his introduction, Dr. Forgeng gives an excellent bibliographic account of the manuscript, so there is no need to repeat these observations here.48

As has been noted above, the startling aspect of the treatise lies in the presentation of the techniques demonstrated by the sacerdotus or priest and a scholar, both in sacerdotal robes. However, as noted in the text above, not only are there ample references in visitations to monks playing with sword and bucklers in Spanish monasteries, but there are probably similar references to be found throughout visitation records throughout Europe and there are already iconographic elements depicting clerics armed with sword and buckler in the fourteenth century Omne Bonum.

Since we have no records pertaining to the manuscript prior to 1579, for dating we must rely on the artwork and the calligraphy, which place it between 1275 – 1410. As noted above, the figures strongly evoke the style of Matthew Paris, both in terms of figure modeling and in terms of how the draping of the fabric is shaded. While no extensive study of the four hands included in the manuscript is known to have been attempted, the text argues for a slightly later dating, perhaps somewhere closer to 1400 while the images seem to argue for a slightly earlier date, perhaps somewhere near 1275.

The text is in Latin, in three different hands, plus, as Dr. Forgeng notes, there is a fourth gothic hand which provides headers but which probably dates from the fifteenth century. While the Latin hand is not especially difficult, and there are few abbreviations, the age and wear of the manuscript has obscured several passages and in fact there may be pages missing altogether.

Throughout, German technical terms are included. This is important, because it expresses another point of connection to a tradition that precedes the author’s work. More importantly, there are consistent references to the verse, and I would posit that this gloss was very likely an

48 Forgeng, MAS, pp. 2-3.
oral tradition that probably governed elementary sword work in the area around Württemberg, and probably in much greater general use.

This verse is the kernel which I will distill from the Priest’s work and present as the original piece. This, combined with references to what the “commoner” (generalis) does or how he would react, gives us a very interesting window into the more general usage patterns for sword and buckler throughout Europe.

*Context: Arms and Armour*

The main underlying assumption for I.33 is that it was intended for unarmoured combat with the sword and buckler. As such, the power evident in medieval manuscripts shown by knights in armour was unnecessary in a civilian context because it took less force to wound a man wearing robes or a cotte than it did to wound a man in an arming coat or in full harness. As with most unarmoured forms of weapon-arts, the weapon-bearing hand is free to drift forward in an effort to trade power for time. However, when the same techniques are employed by armoured men-at-arms, as in the Holkham Bible, the figures are well-wound and the entire of the body is harnessed to generate power. The application of the core principles does not appear to have changed, but the trading of time for power seems to have been a simple, and rational martial response to the defensive properties of the clothing or armour worn by the opponent. This treatise focuses only on the unarmoured applications of the art.

Another issue that arises because of the lack of armour worn by the combatants is the defensive use of the sword and buckler. First, the sword itself is used to provide cover to the combatant through blade contact, in Latin a ligadura (a bind). Having a larger area to defend with, it is far more likely that an opponent’s incoming strike may be caught on the thirty inches
of blade rather than on the ten to sixteen inches of buckler (twelve was more usual). The buckler, by contrast, is tasked primarily to protect the most vulnerable target—the forward hand and forearm that wields the sword. Once the bind is made with the sword, controlling the opponent’s primary weapon, the buckler is transferred to improve the bind (and thus free the sword to strike) or it is used to strike, in the German lingo used in the treatise a *schildknock*.

According to both written and pictorial evidence, medieval shields as wielded by knights and men-at-arms were designed primarily to intercept and deflect blows. The combatants shown in Paulus Kal’s manuscript, dating from the third quarter of the fifteenth century, do the opposite: they block with the buckler and strike with the sword.\(^4^9\) This represents a rational response. The buckler is much smaller than a medieval knight’s shield, and the shield itself drops off as armour improves during the course of the fourteenth century. With an unarmoured combatant, intercepting an incoming strike is very difficult with a small buckler, but it is not so hard to interpose the sword, so the essence of the tactical problem is how to gain control over the opponent’s sword while counter-striking as quickly as possible once that control was achieved.

*Walpurgis and Women in Combat*

As mentioned in the introduction above, the inclusion of Walpurgis is problematic but interesting. There are other women bearing swords depicted in medieval illuminations, including an interesting French one from 1405 that shows women outside of a fortress bearing swords against the armoured knights. Although they are not fighting in the illustration, they do hold their swords in the same position that Walpurgis does in RA MS I.33.\(^5^0\) There is another, unattributed depiction from the late fifteenth century, which shows a woman aggressively wielding a sword in

\(^{4^9}\) Paulus Kal, *Fechtbüch*, Bayerisches Staatsbibliotek Munich, CGM 1507, ff. 52v-57r.

\(^{5^0}\) Laurent Premierfois, *Compendium and summary of Thebais and Achilleis*, British Library MS Burney fol. 79, 1405.
a raid against a town, although whether they are raiding or defending is not clear. Most depictions found in medieval illuminations anachronistically depict Amazons in currently fashionable harness (a “harness” meaning a full armour), and should not be taken as evidence for widespread participation of women in war and warlike activities. However, at least one medieval philosopher, no less than the person of Ptolemy of Lucca (1236-1337), weighed in favorably in the debate sparked by Aristotle women should participate in war and war-like activities: “If, therefore, feminine virtue is strengthened in gymnasia and in warlike activities, it would seem to be appropriate for the practice of war to pertain to them.”

While there is insufficient evidence to conclude that women did participate in arms on a regular basis, we do know that they occasionally took them up as defenders against sieges and raids. It is not too much to say that perhaps some women during the fourteenth and fifteenth century played at the buckler with their brothers or fathers, but this would have been a comparatively rare circumstance.

The System

Guards

The Priest has built his sophisticated system around the kernel of an older verse tradition, taking into account the responses likely to be encountered. He thus offers his refinements on the

51 See included illustration until the original is identified.
53 Despite the rich tradition of depiction of the ancient Amazons in armour fashionable in the age, and the presence and influence of Joan of Arc, depictions of women in armour or wielding weapons (other than knives) are quite rare.
54 Again, Dr. Forgeng has commented on the intriguing possibility of this work being the product of a cathedral school, pointing out further that the University of Heidelberg found it necessary just four years after its founding in 1385 to prohibit university students from studying at schools teaching sword and buckler. See Forgeng, p. 5; see also Sydney Anglo, MARE, p. 8. The presence of a female student is particularly intriguing and will be treated in more detail below.
common art of fighting in an expanded glossing format. He uses the kernel verse as both a starting point and a source of *authoritas*, sufficiently establishing it as an older, more well-known guide to the art. Unfortunately, it does not appear that the whole of the original verse is included, and there is some difficulty in detaching the verse from the glossing text. In fact, I believe at two points he even attempts to insert verse which is not part of the original as such, as will be discussed below. The Priest’s pedagogical technique is fortunate, as it will allow us to more clearly examine the core of the fighting art and use it as a point of comparison with future German texts. But the whole of the Priest’s sophisticated system is also of interest, as he references likely responses by what he calls the *generalis*; Dr. Holland translates this as the “common fencer,” while I prefer the more generic “commoner,” “common combatant” or even the original *generalis*.

First, he presents seven guards or *custodiae*, which Holland, Hand and Wagner, and Rawlings translate as “wards.”55 The relationship between a “guardian” is an interesting parallel, suggesting overtones of custodianship or protection. He then proceeds to show sequences based on each of the *custodiae*, giving counters and counters to these counters into what amounts to a flowing decision tree. The choices presented are not black and white, however. Rather, each illustrates a principle or a variation on a principle, or rests firmly upon a principle which the author cites in the text as an appeal to the authority of the verse. That the verse has such authority is a testament to its potential for its widespread use as a training tool.

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55 Stephen Hand and Paul Wagner, *Medieval Swordsmanship: The Combat System of Royal Armouries MS I.33*, Union City, CA: Chivalry Bookshelf, 2003. This was a preliminary analysis, and I believe it has been largely but not completely supplanted, especially in terms of the footwork, by interpretations by David Rawlings and Dr. Robert Holland. Dr. Holland’s work has not yet been published, but remains in the form of course notes given in his courses from 2006 and 2009 (author’s collection). Mr. Rawlings’ interpretations are available only in DVD format, “Sword and Buckler I.33 Part I” and “Sword and Buckler I.33 Part II,” released in the UK by Boar’s Tooth.
In I.33, as in the German, Italian, and Burgundian systems which follow, all fighting proceeds from the guards, flows through them, and ends in one called Longpoint. They keep with the Aristotelian conceptions of time, where all actions much begin, travel through, and end in a specific point in time and space. Pedagogically, as we will see with both Liechtenauer and Fiore dei Liberi, the custodiae create a simplified model which allows the student to much more quickly calculate possibilities and to weigh possible courses of action. As the Priest declares in I.33, “It may be observed that in general all combatants, or all men holding a sword in hand, even if they are ignorant of the art of combat, use these seven guards, concerning which we have seven verses.” 56 Even in the Burgundian Jeu de la Hache, which has no illustrations, we see a list of three basic guards, and the actions all use one of these guards, but then these three are expanded by having a mirror on the right and left, for a total of six. There is remarkable consistency over several hundred years in the presentation of the fundamental combat positions, and even more startling, in the close similarities of the positions themselves and the possible actions resulting from them.

Versus:

Versus:

Septem custodie sunt sub brach incipiende;
Humero dextrali datur alter,
terna sinistro;
Capiti da quartam,
Da dextro latere quintam;
Pectori da sextam;
Postrema sit tibi langort.

The seven guards should begin with Under Arm;
The second is given to the right shoulder,
The third to the left [shoulder];
Give the fourth to the head,
Give the fifth to the right side;
Give the sixth to the breast;
Finally, you should have Longpoint [Langort] 57

56 Forgeng, MAS, p. 20.
57 Plate 1, Forgeng MAS p. 20. The second custodia line is presented again on p. 56 (plate 19).
Each is presented with a very short positional and numerical reference. Only one of the symbolic names used in the later German or Italian traditions are included, except for the final one, langort, or “long point.” Each of these has been illustrated by the I.33 author, and they appear throughout the text as starting and ending points.

The fragment that I have identified on the following page suggests that three of them will “break” all of the others, Tres sunt que preeunt, relique tunc fugiunt, “There are three that take the fore, the rest then flee,” and this is interesting if compared to Fiore dei Liberi’s guardie, where his three pulsativa guards correspond in the Getty version to the first three of the I.33:

Table 2-1: Comparison of First Three Guards in I.33 and Fiore dei Liberi's Guardie Pulsative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I.33</th>
<th>Fiore dei Liberi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub brach (Under Arm)</td>
<td>Tutte Porta di Ferro (Iron Gate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humero dextrali (right shoulder)</td>
<td>Posta di Donna Destra (woman’s guard)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humero sinistro (left shoulder)</td>
<td>Posta di Donna Sinestra (left woman’s guard)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When Fiore discusses guardie which are pulsativa, he means that these are full-powered, able to harness the body’s large muscle groups most efficiently. Hence, they are best for striking. Only the poste de donne and tutta porta di ferro guards are considered by Fiore to qualify to be pulsativa, so it is an interesting parallel between the verse, “there are three that take to the fore, the rest then flee.” If this means the first three, then we have a set of powerful striking guards present in the verse and the same three are favored by Fiore in his system some one hundred years later.

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58 Ibid, pp. 22-3, (plate 2).
59 Fiore dei Liberi, Fior di Battaglia, fols. 23v and 24r.
In a similar way, we can see analogues for the later German guards as well. All seven of the fighting positions are held at the waist or higher, and the illustrations of them put them at a wide distance. This is characteristic of the later Liechtenauer tradition, where guards above the head are preferred and the overall fight “drops from above” down upon the defender’s attempts to make cover. If all of the guards are compared to their Liechtenauerian counterparts, the result is interesting:

Table 2-2: Comparison of the Seven Guards in RA MS I.33 and the Vier Leger from the Liechtenauer Tradition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I.33</th>
<th>Liechtenauer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub brach (Under Arm)</td>
<td>(no analogue)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humero dextrali (right shoulder)</td>
<td>Vom Tag (“from the Sun”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humero sinistro (left shoulder)</td>
<td>Vom Tag (left shoulder variant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capiti</td>
<td>Ochs (“Ox” – covers from above)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Da dextro latere</td>
<td>Pflug (“the Plow” – right side, hip anchor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pectori</td>
<td>Pflug (right side, chest anchor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Langort</td>
<td>Langenort (“longpoint”)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Liechtenauer uses only four core *leger* or guards in his system. Of those, there is very close correspondence between these four and four of the I.33 guards as shown in the table above. *Vom Tag*, which can in the Liechtenauer system be held at the right or left shoulder, corresponds closely to the second and third sword positions at the *humero dextrali* and the *humero sinistro*. *Ochs*, held high to defend the head against blows from above, is very close to the one identified as the fourth position, *capiti*. *Pflug*, a strongly anchored position over the right or left hip, corresponds closely in purpose and position to the fifth ward, *da dextro latere*. Finally, and

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61 The *Vier Leger* are first given in Hanko Döhringer’s *hausbüch* of 1389, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg, H3227a, fol. 32r. For a visual reference, see Paulus Kal’s *Fechtbüch*, Bayerisches Staatsbibliotek München, CGM 1507, ff. 58r and 58v.
closest of all, the guard *langort* is precisely the same, only with updated language, known by Liechtenauer’s time simply as *langenort*.

In presenting the system, the author begins with the first guard (under-arm), and then proceeds to offer counters to the guard and the proper actions should the opponent fail to act as prescribed. In terms of space, the first guard is presented in the most detail, being first illustrated on plate 1 and extending through plate 16. He returns to the guard again on plate 22, “since some things were left out before.”\(^{62}\) Apparently, more was left out, because he returns to it again on plate 26, and only plate 31. On plate 17 he begins with permutations of the second guard (right shoulder), which go through plate 21, just five plates. The third guard (left shoulder) begins on plate 23 on finishes with the top figure on plate 28, where the fourth guard (overhead), begins. The fifth guard is presented out of sequence, on plates 54 to 56, a rather glaring omission (it is shown later, in opposition to the Priests Special Longpoint, on plate 53), but given the context of the other manuscript pages, it would appear to have been included as a continuation following the discovered error. The sixth guard (chest) receives just a plate and a half, ending at the top of plate 34, where the seventh guard (longpoint) is embraced with enthusiasm, as he reiterates many of the core principles from plates 34 through 40 (it is also returned to in plate 45):

\[\text{Nota quot totus nucleus artis dimicatorie consistit in illa vltma custodia, que nuncupatur langort; preterea omnes actus custodiarum siae gladij determinantur in ea, i. finem habent, \& non in alijs; vnde magis considera eam surpadi[c]ta prima.}\]

Note that the entire heart of the art of combat lies in the final guard, which is called langenort; and all actions of the guards or of the sword finish or have their conclusion in this one, and not in others. Therefore, study it more than the aforementioned First Guard.\(^{63}\)

In addition to the seven “common” guards, the author presents several others. The first

\(^{62}\) Forgeng, *MAS* p. 63, plate 22. Inexplicably, there is another return to the first guard on plate 26, *MAS* p. 70-1, but this one seems to offer no new insights.

\(^{63}\) Ibid, p. 23 (plate 2).
one offered is a “special” version of “high” longpoint (*superior langort*), which the priest adopts, “as an example to his students.” The next offered is the “common” (*custodia generalis*) named Fiddlebow (*vidilpoge*), which he treats on plates 43-44, and the top of plate 45 (the bottom has the aforementioned revisit to longpoint). Pride of place is given then to “priests special longpoint,” (*suam custodiam specificatam langort*), which is very oddly named, since the point is not extended as in the more general or high versions treated in such detail. The Priest then proceeds to show is “special” guard on plates 46 - 53, pausing to include the previously omitted fifth guard material, and continuing again on plates 59 - 62 as he goes through using it to counter the seven common guards. It seems clear that there is a preference for this last “priest’s special longpoint,” that it was a personal variation offered as an advantageous improvement over the common system, but adhering to the same core principles. Finally, the priest offers the final guard, “Walpurgis’” guard, on plates 63 – 64.

**Guards in Opposition**

Within the system, guards may be countered either by the guards themselves, or by special counters. The author writes, “Note that the first guard or under-arm may be opposed by itself, that is, the one who adopts the opposition can oppose the one standing in First Guard by using the same guard.” The author will later use his “Priest’s Special Longpoint” to show advantages against all seven of the guard-set, but he does not take the time to show how each guard matches up against the others, a curious omission. Perhaps, favoring his own “Priests

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64 Ibid, p. 100 (plate 41).  
65 Ibid, p. 104 (plate 43).  
68 Ibid, p. 24 (plate 3).
Special Longpoint,“ he declined to teach the other guards because he felt his own approach was superior.

**Special Counter-Guards**

In addition to the guards, there are several counter-guards presented. The first two are offered in the kernel verse, *halbschil* (“half-shield”) and *langort* (“longpoint”). Half-shield is first presented on page Judging by the amount of space offered, the Priest prefers half-shield, to longpoint, as he writes, “This is a common opposition, and the counters to this opposition on the part of the one standing in the guard are bindings (*ligaciones*) below and above.” He seems to suggest that longpoint is less effective because the opponent can simply “bind from below or from above,” entangling the blade and ceding control over it, which loses the initiative. There is important subtext here: implicit in this statement is its counter—that langort is implicitly unstable and therefore less desirable as a position. Stability and power are the counter of instability and weakness, and this is a principle common to all three treatises we will consider.

He also presents two other counters not offered in the kernel verse, including the *Kurcke* (“the crutch”), which he treats extensively starting on plate 32 through plates 41, an impressive spread of nine plates, and again, this is a special variant on the “common” technique, “The opposition to this guard [first] will be quite rare, because no one uses it except the Priest or his young protégées, i.e., his students, and this opposition is called *Krucke.*” The other, unnamed one, is offered on plate 57 and is described in a very long paragraph on that plate, where he analyzes the flexible options provided by what he considers a very advantageous position, “a rare opposition that is very good an example for his students. And you should know that if the

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69 Ibid, p. 43 (plate 12).
70 Ibid, p. 32 (plate 7).
Student executes the thrust which is commonly executed, the Priest should also execute a thrust against the student’s thrust (a technique which is well-known in the later German tradition as *absetzen*,\(^71\) well as being found in Fiore dei Liber’s *arte d’armizare* as the exchange of the thrust (*scambiare della punta*),\(^72\) only the priest’s version offers more power, as it is accompanied by a powerful step, “his thrust works better, entering with the left foot.”\(^73\) I believe what we see here is a refinement in progress of the kernel system, where the priest has found a variant that he favors because it offers a clear martial advantage of stability and power over the traditional mechanism. This kind of iterative development that at once works within the core principles and offers a refinement based on a combination of experience and art must represent how the martial arts of Europe developed over the course of several centuries.

At this point, we have seven principle guards, which even the *generalis* ignorant of the art of combat will adopt. To this the Priest has added several more, some already in the common martial culture (*Fiddlebow, High Longpoint, Walpurgis’ Guard*), and his own preferred variant, which he calls Priests’ Special Longpoint. These guards may oppose themselves, or they may be opposed by special counters. Two of these are in the kernel text, *halbschil* “half-shield” and *langort* “longpoint,” while the Priest once again has his own particular variants, including *krucke* “crutch” and the unnamed one on plate 57, which he believes to be superior and rare. We will now turn out attention to how these guards and counters are used.

*Using the Guards*

The progression begins in the first guard, under-arm. The opponent follows the verse and quickly snaps into *halbschil*. What next? While the focus of the chapter is on how the combatant

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\(^{71}\) Hanko Döbringer, HS 3227a, fol. 34r.


\(^{73}\) Forgeng *MAS* p. 132, (plate 57).
in under-arm deals with *halbschil*, the Priest does eventually return to the problem on plate 22:

> Posset quis dubitare quomodo scolaris inuaderet sacredotem; & sciendum quod sacredos latitando obmittit omnes suas defensiones, informando scolarem qui sicut stat non variando scutum nec gladium magis approprpinquiat, i. paulo reciendi plagem, vt hic patet per ymagines.

One might wonder how the student should attack the Priest; and not that the Priest by delaying omits all his defenses, instructing the student, who as he stands, without more shifting of buckler or sword, approaches, and just afterwards gets a blow, as is illustrated here.\(^74\)

> Note that with the words, “without more shifting of buckler and sword,” implies

movements of guard and counter-guard adopted in response. The idea of staying in motion and the critical importance of footwork—largely missing from the I.33 text—is expressed by Hanko Döbringer in his text as *frequens motens*, and this concept will be dealt with in more detail in the next chapter. This is the principle of maneuver, of sustaining flexibility while simultaneously reducing the opponent’s options. In a modern context, it is discussed as moving inside the opponent’s decision cycle, driving the combat with tempo-driven operations designed to make it difficult for the opponent to observe, orient, decide and act.

The opponent adopts the first counter in the verse, *halbschil*. At this point, the Priest does not advise the student in first-guard to attack because, “he who stands in under-arm should not deliver any blow…because he cannot reach his opponent’s upper part [being covered by the sword] and to attack the lower part will be dangerous to his head.”\(^75\) This is good advice, and it is repeated in Fiore dei Liberi’s *Fior di Battaglia*, when he advises his *scolari* not to strike for the opponent’s legs because it exposes the head, unless one has fallen.\(^76\) Here we see articulated what I call the *Principle of Measure*, where targets along the low-line are avoided except in special circumstances, because the upper body is closer. We will see this principle articulated

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\(^75\) Ibid, p. 24 (plate 3).
\(^76\) Fiore dei Liberi, *Fior di Battaglia*, fol. 26r.
explicitly in the next two treatises.

The verse provides the proposed response by the combatant in under-arm. “When halbshil is adopted, fall under the sword and shield.”77 While interpreters disagree sharply on precisely how this technique is to be executed, it is illustrated on plates 3, 5, 21, 26, 30, 46, and 48. Unfortunately, despite the number of references, none adds substantially to the scant information encrypted in the verse and shown on the picture, which is made more difficult by the occlusion of the sword as it disappears behind the buckler. Given the ending position, I believe that the proposed action begins at the underarm position, and ends with a bind (ligadura) against the sword on the combatant’s left side, the force driving the sword slightly and opening the center of the combatant to a follow-on attack. The verse is oft-repeated in the text, and the essence of the action seems to be a bind against the sword since it is the most forward. Here what we will see as the Principle of Power is presented as subtext, sacrificed should the sword come too far forward. Preserving stability is, from the subtext, an important principle of the art. We can see it also expressed in the balanced, centered stances of the I.33 combatants and in the figures drawn by Fiore explored in chapter 5.

The Priest himself offers his take on plate 3, “If he is ordinary he will go for your head; you should use a stichslach (thrust-strike);”78 This is reminiscent of Fiore’s scambiare della punta or “exchange of the thrust,” or the German concept of absetzen mentioned above. The thrust takes place after the ligadura is in place, and relative security has been achieved through blade contact.

The Priest then gives the opponent’s likely response. First, he may simply strike to the head, “Note that he who lies above sends a blow towards the head without a shichlach (shield-
strike). But if you would learn from the Priest’s advice, then counter-bind and step.”79 If not sufficiently surprised and caught mentally off-balance, he may press against the combatant’s sword, having a leverage advantage because he uses the forteza or strong against the punta or weak of his opponent’s weapon. Precisely how the opponent could counter-respond is shown on the next plate, plate 4, where the opponent captures the Priest’s sword and drives it towards the ground.80 In this case, the Priest recommends, “If he counter-binds and steps, your counter should be a Schiltslach, “shield-strike.”81 If he pushes the sword and steps closer, strike with the buckler or, more aggressively, envelop the arms.82 In either case, the combatants strive to extend the control over their opponent’s sword and buckler by pressing them with the buckler in order to free their own sword. This is a core principle of the system, where the objective is to capture the opponent’s primary and secondary weapons, then attack with relative impunity.

Finally, in keeping with the strike/counter/counter-remedy formula, the Priest’s options once bound are enumerated, he can durchtreten, or “step through;” he can change the sword—mutare—or he can use his buckler hand to seize the opponent’s weapons.83 These options are not given in the verse, but they do map to later responses within the German tradition, and the inclusion of the German word durchtreten means that the Priest has either drawn from a later missing element of the verse, or else from another part of the popular martial art.84 The changing

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79 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
82 This option is provided on the same page, but adds nothing to the main alogryhym and has thus not been included.
84 The Priest demonstrates the technique of “stepping” or driving through—durchtreten—on plate 18, Forgeng MAS pp. 52-5, plates 17-18.
of the sword—*mutare*, is detailed on plate 6, as the Priest moves his sword from underneath to atop the student’s sword, presumably with a small, efficient turn.\(^85\) The final permutation is given as injected verse, “the cleric thus *nukcen*, “nock”, ordinary combatants *schutzen*, “cover.”\(^86\) The Priest transfers control from his sword to the buckler, then strikes with impunity.

*Binding*

The sword can be bound in one of four directions; from the right, from the left, from the top and from the bottom, yielding simple permutations: High right, high left, low right, low left. The Priest writes about this in his treatment on the counter *langort*, plate 12, when he quotes the kernel verse, “When langort is adopted, at once bind below and above.”\(^87\) He then adds to the verse, “But a bind above will always be more useful than one below.”\(^88\) Why this is so has already been offered on plate 4, when he explains that the bind below can be resolved by *mutare* or “changing” positions with a little turn so that the combatant’s sword ends up on top. It is shown again on plate 15.\(^89\)

Once bound, eventually one or both of the combatants must break the bind, and the kernel verse’s advice in this case is to follow and not allow the opponent to escape the bind:

\begin{quote}
*Ligans ligati contrarij sunt & irati;*
*Ligatus fugit ad partes laterum; peto sequi.*
\end{quote}

The one who binds and the one who is bound are contrary and irate;
The one who is bound flees to the side, I seek to pursue.\(^90\)

\(^{85}\) Forgeng, *MAS* p. 30-1, (plate 6).
\(^{86}\) Ibid.
\(^{87}\) Ibid, p. 42-3, (plate 12).
\(^{88}\) Ibid.
\(^{89}\) Ibid, p. 48-9, (plate 15).
\(^{90}\) Ibid, p. 35, (plate 8); also repeated on p. 44 (plate 13); p. 75 (plate 28); the second line only repeated on p. 99 (plate 40); the first line only repeated on p. 112 (plate 47); both lines repeated on p. 120 (plate 51); p. 124 (plate 53); the first line only again on p. 139 (plate 60); p. 147 (plate 64);
The Priest provides a gloss for the principle on plate 35, the first time it is presented. He writes, “Note that whenever the one who binds and the one who is bound are wrangling then the one who is bound can flee wherever he will if he likes, and this is called for in all bindings. But you should be prepared for this, so that wherever the bound one goes, you should be pursuing him.” 91 On plate 44, the Priest illustrates one permutation of the principle, again quoting it. Here he has “followed” the scholar and pressed him with his buckler, staying on the same side and driving directly for the head. On plate 75 he shows the bind, but does not resolve it, merely quoting the verse again. In plate 99, in the presentation one of the four possible binds (quatuor ligacionibus), he restates the principle. By plate 47 he is perhaps growing tired of the repeated illustrations as he writes, “And since you have many instances of this above, it is not necessary to give more examples.” 92 And yet he does repeat the verse without showing examples of possible resolutions on plates 51, 53, 60 and 64.

The principle here is that both combatants are restricted in the bound, and that both are stymied and struggle against one another. The later concept for this will become known in the German system under Liechtenauer as binden, and we find this expressed directly in Hanko Döbringer’s hausbüch, fol. 22v, when he quotes and glosses on Liechtenauer’s verse:

“According to this teaching, and of the Art, the opponent may not withdraw from the bind without being hurt, because as Liechtenauer says, ‘strike such that he is confused should he withdraw.’” 93 This very much appears to be the same principle.

In the bind, the state of being in competition requires combatants to quickly ascertain the “state” of the bind between the two weapons and to more quickly resolve their decision than their opponent does. Within the German system this becomes the concept of fühlen, literally “feeling.”

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91 Ibid, p. 35, (plate 8).
93 Hanko Döbringer, hausbüch, H3227a, fol. 22v.
Again the first reference is from Döbringer, who continues his gloss on Liechtenauer’s verse,

“Learn fühlen; Indes is a word that cuts,” because if you are at the sword (binden) with someone, and you are skilled in the fühlen, regardless of whether your opponent is weak or strong at the sword, immediately (indes), while you are in the bind, you may well observe and plan what you should do against him.94

This conception of weak versus strong will become a core principle within both the German and Italian systems. The principle of immediacy, of acting quickly in order to keep the opponent off-balance, is also central. In Fiore dei Liberi’s Fior di Battaglia, the idea is expressed frequently as the word subito, which translates with deceptive simplicity as “immediately,” but which contains a great deal of imperative, underscoring the tactical importance of acting within the opponent’s decision cycle.95

Principles in the Verse

Using just the preliminary sequence, it is possible to capture the essence of the underlying principles of the entire manuscript. First, the system is built around seven common guards often encountered whether or not combatants known the martial art or not. To these are added some not found in the verse but which may be encountered, including Fiddlebow, High Longpoint, and Walpurgis’ Guard. These may be used to oppose each other, and will always end in langort, because the long position is where the sword ends when striking a blow or thrust. To these guards may be added other counter-guards, two of which are drawn from the verse, halbschil and langort, and two of which are offered by the Priest as unique variations that have special advantages, and they include krucke and the unnamed one shown on plate 57.

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94 Ibid.
95 While the concept of the decision cycle is not expressly called out, the critical importance of flexibility and a quicker combat tempo have been recently recalled to importance in the maneuver theory of USAF Col. John Boyd, and the best expression of Boyd’s theory is found in Frans Osinga, Science, Strategy and War: The Strategic Theory of John Boyd. Strategy and history. London: Routledge, 2006. This appears to be a fundamental principle of war which all four medieval treatises emphasize.
In using half-shield, the opponent guards his upper body using the sword and his forward hand using the buckler. If his opponent does nothing, he can strike or thrust for one of the “four openings.” This action will force his opponent to act, bringing him forward and resulting in a bind (ligadura) of the sword. This bind may be from any of four directions, above and below, right and left. In response to the bind, one of the combatants may attempt to change the bind to secure the more advantageous top position, mutare, or they may attempt another form of turn to “flee” the bind—in this case this should not be allowed, and the recommended response so to follow the disengagement with an immediate strike, preferably while also re-establishing the bind using the buckler.

On the other side, the combatant opposed by half-shield may profitably move immediately to bind the sword, as he likely has no viable targets. From this bind, he can do three things—he can durchtreten or step through, he can change his sword, mutare, or he can seize the opponent’s weapon.

In both cases, the objective for both combatants is to seize the initiative by capturing the opponent’s weapon with a ligadura. This can be done using relatively soft oppositions, as when he merely strikes to the head, as the generale does, or, more preferably, it can be extended using the shield to bind with a schiltslach or a nukcen, or even with a grasp on the sword. Extreme respect is given to the opponent’s weapon, at least in the Priest’s version of it, while the generale sometimes eschews this superior form of control and moves right to a strike for the head, risking his own safety by failing to first establish control over the opponent’s weapons.

The predominant principle offered is for the combatant to seek security by seizing control of the opponent’s sword through a bind, what the Priest refers to in Latin as ligadure. This core principle will recur in the works of Hanko Döbringer and Fiore dei Liberi.
Kernel Verse

The kernel verse, as I term it, seems to have been an active teaching tool that predates the I.33 manuscript. The author refers to it with an appeal to authority in many places throughout the text, but he then feels free to explain and build on the core text with his own interpretations. This free-form application of individual will and creativity is crucial to understanding the art of combat, what the Priest calls the in Latin the *artem dimicatoriam*. In his interpretation, the Priest changes none of the core principles, but rather appeals to them in presenting his own ideas, most notably the curious Priest’s Special Longpoint, the *Krucke*, and the unnamed counter presented on plate 57.

When referring to the verse, the Priest interprets, explains, and in perhaps even augments to existing verse structure. But the verse itself is hard to pull out of the text—it is scattered throughout the manuscript in fragments and may not be complete (only counters to the first guard are covered). It may even be at the Priest augmented the verse, attributing verses to it which did not originally belong in order to secure his assertion of the importance of his interpretations. I will several of these instances below, which are different than the core text in terms of specificity, tone and application.

I have thus attempted to assemble the verse from the manuscript starting on plate 3 and going through the last citation, found on plate 38, and many of the verses—especially the one relating to binding—are repeated throughout, signifying their presentation as an underlying principle rather than a specific tactical maneuver or technique. In fact, this “principled” tone characterizes all of the verses I have included above. After I have treated my detailed analysis, based both on textual and iconographic evidence—tempered by my teaching experience sword-in-hand—I will return to the more specific system advocated by the glosser and author,
presumably the Priest or his representative.

Table 2-3: Original “Kernal” verse around which the I.33 text is built

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Versus:</th>
<th>Verse:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Septem custodie sunt sub brach incipiende; Humero dextrali datur alter, terna sinistro; Capiti da quartam, Da dextro latere quintam; Pectori da sextam; Postrema sit tibi langort. | The seven guards should begin with Under Arm; The second is given to the right shoulder, The third to the left [shoulder]; Give the fourth to the head, Give the fifth to the right side; Give the sixth to the breast; Finally, you should have Longpoint. 

| Tres sunt que preeunt, relique tunc fugiunt; Dimicatio est diversarum plagarum ordination & diuiditur in septem partes vt hic | There are three that take to the fore, the rest then flee; Combat is the disposition of various blows, & it is divided into seven parts as here.

| Custodia prima retinet contraria bina: Contrarium primum halpschil, Langortique secundum. | The first guard has two counters: The first counter is Half-shield [halbschil] and Longpoint [Langort] the second.

| Dum ducitur halpschil, cade sub gladium quoque scutum. | When halbschil is adopted, fall under the sword and shield.

| Dom ducitur langort, statim liga sub quoque supra. | When langenort is adopted, bind at once above and below.

| Ligans ligati contrarij sunt & irati; Ligatus fugit ad partes laterum; peto sequi. | The one who binds and the one who is bound are contrary and irate; The one who is bound flees to the side, I seek to pursue.

| Dum subligaueris, caueas ne decipieris; Dum subligatur, capud ligantis recipiatur. | When you underbind, beware lest you be deceived; When one underbinds, the head of the one who binds is hit.

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96 Plate 1, Forgeng MAS p. 20. The second custodia line is presented again on p. 56 (plate 19).
97 Plate 2, Forgeng MAS p. 23. This is not cited as verse by the author, but it is written in verse and set off. The other two lines that follow are probably added by the author, “these seven parts are used by ordinary combatants [generales], the combat-waging cleric [oppositum clericus] holds the opposite [counter] and the means. Because these “lyrics” are self-referential to the Priest, they cannot be in the original. The included line, however, has the same tone, cryptic character, and meter as the known long first verse and those that follow.
98 Ibid, p. 20 (plate 1).
99 Ibid, p. 24 (plate 3); also repeated on p. 24 (plate 5); p. 51 (plate 16).
100 Ibid; also repeated on p. 111 (plate 46).
101 Ibid, p. 43 (plate 12).
102 Ibid, p. 35; also repeated on p. 44 (plate 13); p. 75 (plate 28); the second line only repeated on p. 99 (plate 40); the first line only repeated on p. 112 (plate 47); both lines repeated on p. 120 (plate 51); p. 124 (plate 53); the first line only again on p. 139 (plate 60); p. 147 (plate 64).
103 Ibid, p. 95 (plate 38).
Overall, the verse appears to be incomplete, but it is hard to be certain. Only the first custodia has counters given in the verse, and I find it likely that the original had a follow-on verse for each custodia, although this is not certain. The I.33 author uses those two counters—halbschilt and langort—for all the custodiae, so it is possible that it is either complete or, perhaps, the author had only come into possession of a fragment and was using it to teach, or perhaps had only learned a fragment of it himself.

There are other sections, which the author attributes to the “verse,” but about which I remain unconvinced. Whereas all of the prescriptions in the kernel verse are somewhat cryptic in tone, but are short in their presentation, and take as their subject the art of combat, not the cleric or his student. I believe the Priest may have potentially been engaged in augmenting the original verse with his own ideas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Versus:</th>
<th>Verse:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Hic religat, calcat scolaris;</em></td>
<td>Here the student counter-binds and steps;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>sit sibi schiltschlach,</em></td>
<td>He should execute a Schiltslag,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Siue sinesta manu cicumsdat brachia cleri</em></td>
<td>Or with his left hand let him envelop the arms of the cleric.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Vnde versus:</em></td>
<td>Hence the verse,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>‘Clerici sic nukcen; generalis non nulli schutzen.’</em></td>
<td>“The Clerics thus ‘nod,’ while ordinary combatants ‘cover.’”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Si generalis erit, recipit caput, sit tibi stichslag;</em></td>
<td>If he is ordinary (generalis) he will stichslag;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Si religat, calcat, contraria sint dibi schiltslag.</em></td>
<td>If he counter-binds and steps, your counter should be a Schiltslag.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the first “verse,” the student, scolaris, is mentioned, for the first and only time in the context of the verse itself. The scolaris is mentioned in much of the gloss, but only here does he appear in the verse itself. On the second line of the first augmentation, he refers to the generalis,

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104 Ibid, p. 27 (plate 4).
105 Ibid, p. 31 (plate 6).
but like the use of the term *scolaris*, the reference to *generalis* seems to apply to the Priest’s teaching, not to the kernel verse itself.

In the second “verse,” there is again reference to the *generalis*, and now references to what “he” might do, be it counter-binding or striking to the head. Again, this specific tactical advice is couched in the sense of an action by the subject of the combatant, not of the art itself. Combined, I believe these two “verses” are augmentations or additions to the original verse, but they speak to the importance of appealing to a known authority for going outside of the established order.

**Conclusion**

RA MS I.33 represents not only the first coherent evidence for a systematic martial art in Europe. Dating from the end of the thirteenth or very early fourteenth century, its sophisticated principles are built around a kernel verse that is older—possibly much older—than the treatise itself. The *artem dimicatoriam* itself seems to be built around simple principles, a system of guards and counters which may be used creatively in order to formulate a flexible yet effective response. The art appears to be flexible enough to allow substantial innovation within the principles, as evidenced by the Priest’s inclusion of notably different guards and counters. But even these additions did not attempt to alter the core principles and tactics espoused by the original verse—and indeed the verse itself seems to have stood as a marker of authority to which the Priest appealed and even attempted to augment or append in order to make his case for his own variations. What we have within this text is thus an older, oral expression of principle encoded in mnemonic verse woven into a newer one, recorded for possibly the first time in writing.
While we will probably never know the motivations behind the Priest and his team of scribes and artists for producing the treatise, it’s survival speaks strongly to the sophisticated nature of a martial tradition long practiced by the non-military orders of society that included both clerics, common men, and perhaps women, as well. This tradition may well have given rise, with increasing literacy and leisure of the newly urbanizing culture of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, into a blurring of the traditional spheres between the nobility and gentry on one hand and between the urban merchant and clerical classes.

By using mnemonic devices such as the kernel verse and practicing with inn-yard or clerical teachers, students may well have learned to defend themselves—and to make mischief—which could eventually have played a role in the empowerment and social confidence necessary to strike at the long-held noble monopoly on the legitimate use of violence in the service of social objectives.
CHAPTER 3
ADVICE FROM A MEDIEVAL MARTIAL ARTS MASTER: HS 3227a AND THE KUNST DES FECHTENS OF JOHANNES LIECHTENAUER

First, know that there is only one Art of the sword, and this Art may have been developed hundreds of years ago. This Art is the foundation, the core of any fighting art. Master [Johannes] Liechtenauer understood it and practiced it in its complete depth. It is not the case that he invented the Art—as mentioned before—but he has traveled to many lands, seeking to experience and to learn the real and true Art.1

—Hanko Döbringer

Overview

In the mid-fourteenth century, Johannes Liechtenauer established a formal tradition of German martial arts that survived as late as the seventeenth century.2 Little is known about Liechtenauer, as he did not leave a written text, but he did record his teachings in mnemonic verse also known as zettel or merkeverse, a sophisticated teaching tool probably constructed from a pre-existing oral mnemonic in the same tradition as the kernel around which the 1.33 sword and buckler treatise was built. While Liechtenauer purportedly taught in secret,3 the verse and an accompanying gloss were recorded as early as 1389 presently attributed to the priest Hanko

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1 With all of the Döbringer translations in this chapter, I began with a comparison of two previous transcription/translation editions, including David Lindholm’s Cod.HS.3227a or Hanko Döbringer fechtbüch from 1389, http://www.thearma.org/Manuals/Dobringer_A5_sidebyside.pdf (accessed Dec. 10, 2010), and a submission copy of Thomas Stoeppler’s unpublished version (author’s collection). However, the two differ greatly and I have reworked the text and where necessary referenced the original manuscript in order to devise my own English version of the text.

2 For a complete listing of treatises associated with the Liechtenauer tradition, see Hans-Peter Hils, Meister Johann Liechtenauers Kunst des Langen Schwertes. Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1985.

3 Sigmund Ringeck, a fechtmeister (fighting teacher) in the Liechtenauer tradition, wrote on fol. 10v of his treatise, “This is the beginning of the interpretation of the Knightly Art of the Long Sword, written down in rhymes by a great master of these arts, Johannes Liechtenauer…he recorded his teachings in secret words, so that the art may not be commonly spread.” Translation from Christian Henry Tobler, Secrets of German Medieval Swordsmanship: Sigmund Ringeck’s Commentaries on Master Liechtenauer’s Verse, Union City, CA: Chivalry Bookshelf, 2001, p. 11. The term “fechtmeister” is first found in Ringeck’s text, as he applies it to himself, “Schirmmeister Sigmund Ringeck, at the time fechtmeister of Albrecht, Count Palantine of the Rhine and Duke of Bavaria.”
Döbringer, whose work survives in a *hausbüch* of that date. Blazing a path followed by all of the *fechtmeister* who followed, Döbringer recorded Liechtenauer’s verse, then provided a liberal gloss. It provides a source of exceptional value, as within the Liechtenauer “school” of surviving manuscripts it is the closest to Liechtenauer’s own time. He may even have been still alive when it was written. In contrast to later commentators who focus almost exclusively on the techniques, Döbringer offers an expanded gloss on the sophisticated mental aspects of the fight. His text emphasizes efficiency, power and simplicity; military virtues that firmly connect the early art into the chivalric tradition of knightly combat, “earnest” fighting, as opposed to the “school” fighting emphasized by so many later masters in the tradition.

While Döbringer was the first to record and gloss the Liechtenauer verse, he was only the first in a long series of fighting masters who used the verse to frame and explain the “knightly” art of combat. Liechtenauer’s verses boldly proclaim the author’s intention that they be used by members of the chivalric orders:

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Daß ist dy vor red
Junk ritter lere,
Got lieb haben frawen io eren
So Wechst dein ere
Ube risserschaft und lere
Kunst die dich zyret
Und in kriegen zu eren hofuret
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5 A *hausbüch* is a domestic miscellany, a repository of things such as recipes, remedies, and information about trades. One of the most elaborate has been reproduced in a two-volume facsimile edition by, Gundolf Keil, Eberhard König and Ranier Leng. *Venus und Mars: das Mittelalterlich Hausbüch aus der Sammlung der Fürsten zu Waldburg Wolfegg*, Munich: Prestel, 1997.

6 Jeffry Hull has recently made a case that the early martial arts are in fact best understood as “knightly” martial arts, *ritterkunst*, and has offered his own translations of some key German works, including that of Hanko Döbringer in Jeffrey Hull, with Monika Mariarz and Grzegorz Zabinski, *Knightly Duelling: The Fighting Arts of Medieval Chivalry*, Boulder, CO: Paladin Press, 2009. While presenting very useful and skilled translations tempered by sword-in-hand practice, with excellent analysis of the techniques, the work does not present enough evidence to establish his main argument, which is that “knightly dueling” as expressed in judicial duels and other “earnest” combats were far more common than the “softened” chivalric combats of the tournament of the fourteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

83
This is the Prologue
Young knight learn
To love God and revere women
Thus your honor will grow
Practice knighthood and learn
The Art that dignifies you,
And brings you honor in wars.

Liechtenauer’s verse expressly targets knights—ritter—a term which is best understood as a German analogue to the French term chevalier, which translates literally as “horseman,” but which has a connotation closer to the English word, “knight.” Liechtenauer targets his teaching at members of the equestrian orders who earned their prestige and social status through deeds of arms, especially in the most risky of deeds, war, citing the term ere, which loosely translates to “honor” or, in the military context, “renown.”

In addition to the prologue account, there are examples of armoured duels featured in several of the surviving books in the tradition. Hans Talhoffer, writing in 1450 (and also in his manuscripts of 1459 and 1467), included a duel between Leutold von Königsegg and an unknown combatant. This “duel” has been the subject of considerable debate, with some scholars grouping it with similar expressions of idealized but fictional fighting forms as in King René d’Anjou’s Livre de Tournois, and a minority ascribing it to a historical deeds of arms in the

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7 One might perhaps read “honor” women here, but I have left the author’s translation intact.
8 Transcription and translation from Christian Henry Tobler, In Service of the Duke, op. cit., p. 237. A similar translation is offered from the Hans Talhoffer 1450 treatise by Jeffrey Hull in Knightly Duelling, op. cit., p. 65. The same verse is found in Peter von Danzig’s gloss on Liechtenauer’s verse, and in Hanko Döbringer’s hausbüch.
9 For a fuller discussion of the relationships between the terms, see Maurice Keen, Chivalry, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984.
10 Geoffrey de Charny, writing in the fourteenth century, classified all deeds of arms into three types: jousts, tournaments and wars. Each of the three was laudable and worthy of honor, he wrote, but war was the most laudable because of the commensurate level of risk. See Richard W. Kaeuper and Elspeth Kennedy. The Book of Chivalry of Geoffroi de Charny: Text, Context and Translation. Middle Ages Series. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996. Steven Muhlberger has written about the use of martial deeds as a political legitimizer in Deeds of Arms: Formal Combats in the Late Fourteenth Century, Highland Village, TX: Chivalry Bookshelf, 2005.
11 René d’Anjou, King of Navarre in the fifteenth century, is best known for his beautifully illuminted allegory, the Book of Love, but he is also known for the Livre de Tournois, in which he details an idealized tournament form using plate armour and heavy clubs. See the facsimile René d’Anjou and François Avril, Le Livre
form of an actual judicial duel. Recently Jeffrey Hull has argued that such duels were more common, but this conclusion must remain tentative and preliminary, as no detailed study of the judicial duel phenomenon in the German states has yet been conducted. But a duel very much like this one is shown in Paulus Kal’s treatise as well, as are other kinds of judicial duels, including domestic disputes between a man and a woman, an between commoners dressed in strange leather full-body suits. I believe that the inclusion of the spectrum of deeds of arms strongly suggests that the principles of the kunst des fechten apply in a wide variety of martial contexts, because the core elements of the Art as expressed within the tradition are based on efficient use of the body and hand weapons expressed within Liechtenauer as principles designed for flexible use under the variable conditions that define a combat environment.

Whether or not the Liechtenauer tradition was actually used by the members of the knightly (ritter) orders or not, with the clear declaration in the prologue—the vor red—Liechtenauer and his followers intended these techniques for such use by both professional combatants and, later at least, by more occasional combatants whose rising social status impelled

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de Tournois du Roi René de la Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS français 2695. Paris: Hersher, 1996. The work is particularly valuable for the details René offers on tournament armour, rebated weapons and the clubs, plus the precise dimensions of the fighting field and the ceremonies leading up to the tournament itself. This “club” tournament is the descendent of the earlier bêhourds, fought with ash or whalebone weapons in France, Italy and in the Low Countries, or the kolbenturnier or “club tournament” tradition in the German states.

I have written about the use of judicial duels as deterrent legal mechanisms in “From Iudicum Dei to Combat d’honneur: Morphology of Trial by Combat in the Middle Ages,” Lecture, International Congress of Medieval Studies: Kalamazoo, MI. April, 2008.

Hull cites, in his appendix, a book by Alwin Schultz, the Deutches Leben, from 1892, citing a series of duels from 1347 to 1478, but really only a few examples are given. Hull argues that these are, “just a sample of the many documented combats of the times and places of the fechtbücher,” Jeffrey Hull, Knightly Dueling, op. cit., p. 217-8. Unfortunately, for period spanning one hundred and thirty years, the dozen or so combats cited by Schultz does not strike one as overwhelming in number.

Hull presents a long section focusing on the duel between Leutold von Königsegg mentioned above, but while interesting and highly detailed, I have trouble concluding from these few instances that judicial duels were commonplace. It strikes me that what were more common were emprises, fights that blended national pride, personal renown, and the resulting prestige into a deed of arms fought with sharp weapons in order to increase the excitement and the risk, and the commensurately higher level of renown and corresponding social prestige, as we see in the career of Jacques de Lahlain and William the Marshal.
them towards traditional expressions of noble prestige such as the displaying of heraldic devices and, importantly, the practice of arms.

**The Hausbüch Tradition**

Döbringer’s advice is collated into a form of literature known in German as the *hausbüch* (“housebook”), somewhat akin to the miscellanies found in English and French libraries. A *hausbüch* was a collection of practical advice. Typically, *hausbücher* were collections of recipes, chemical and alchemical formulae, astronomical charts, pigment sources, and sometimes pages recording various ways of life, crafts and professions. A distinct subset of these also focused more on the arts of Mars—on war—and combative themes. At least one included sequences outlining “chivalric” life of the nobility, similar in tone to King René d’Anjou’s *Livre d’Amour* and his idealistic presentation of the medieval tournament in his other work, the *Livre de Tournois*. Some of the more famous books, such as the two from Nuremberg, focused more on recording professions. At a higher level, there is strong evidence in the masterpiece by the unknown Hausbüch master, that such books were intended as aids to memory that followed the tradition of Aristotle and Cicero. While some of been subsequently bound, there is evidence to suggest that *hausbücher* may have remained only temporarily bound, or unbound, in order to

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18 This term seems to have been coined in 1865 by Ralf von Retberg, who first referred to the text in question as a *hausbüch*. See fols. 4r-5v, where the art of memory in the tradition of Aristotle and Cicero is presented to the reader. I will speak more of this tradition in a later chapter, but this inclusion definitively connects the ideas of monastic learning discussed by Mary Carruthers with the secular chivalric culture in which these fighting treatises must be placed.
allow for near-continual expansion, much like a modern digital knowledge base.\textsuperscript{19} It seems likely that far more \textit{hausbücher} were produced than survived, especially given the nature of the loose- or temporarily bound nature, which would sharply their chance for survival and preservation over several centuries.

One \textit{hausbüch}, the one termed such by Ralf von Rethberg in 1865, is of special interest.\textsuperscript{20} Dating from the 1480s, it contains the aforementioned survey of chivalric life, astronomical charts, recipes, on aspects of the mining trade, and folios relating to war machines and combat. It is, however, incomplete, and may have contained as many as twice as many leaves (only 48 fol. survive of the original 108).\textsuperscript{21} Within the text, there are extremely interesting depictions of individual combats that strongly resemble those described in Liechtenauer’s verse discussed below that include unarmoured wrestling, combat with the dagger, sword, staff, polearm, and combat on horseback in both a tournament environment and in war. There are striking similarities between its content and the content of H3227A which strongly suggests a tradition of martial culture and fighting techniques specifically that may have long been a part of the knowledge base widely thought of as necessary for a man of good standing to have in his repertoire.

\textbf{GNM 3227a by Hanko Döbringer}

H3227a is the similar \textit{hausbüch} (and the subject of this chapter).\textsuperscript{22} It is usually attributed to the priest Hanko Döbringer, and dated to 1389.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{19} Christopher Graf zu Waldburg Wolfegg, op. cit., pp. 68-71.
\textsuperscript{20} Op. cit.
\textsuperscript{22} Hanko Döbringer, \textit{Hausbüch}. Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg, Manuscript GNM 3227a, 1389.
\textsuperscript{23} Hans-Peter Hils, \textit{Meister Johann Liechtenauers Kunst des langen Schwertes}. Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1985.
Döbringer’s text forms the bulk of the *hausbüch*, from 13v – 65r, and other interesting sections on martial arts, not attributed to Döbringer, include a single folio on the use of the shield, fol. 74r; on fighting with rods or poles, fol. 78r; on fighting with the *langesmesser* or long knife, fols. 82r – 82v; on the *degen* or dagger, fols. 84r – 85r; and a longer section on *ringen* or wrestling also attributed to Liechtenauer’s teaching, fols. 86r – 89r. Other sections include one on fireworks, the *liber ignium*, which open the book on fols. 1r – 4v; on chemical recipes, fols. 4v – 10v; on heat treating or iron hardening, fols. 11r – 12r; on alchemical recipes, fols. 12v – 13r; a miscellaneous section including astrological chart, the four elements and temperaments, health
extracts from the *Regimes Salernitanum* and the *Liber Platonis Vacca*, fols. 66v – 73v;\(^{24}\) pigment recipes, drinking vessel manufacture and medical prescriptions, fols. 74v – 77v; gemstone therapy, fols. 79r – 80r; an “interval” table, fol. 83v; magical recipes, fols. 85r – 85v; a huge section of miscellaneous recipes, fols. 90v – 165v; and finally, some kind of register, from 166r – 169v.

Additionally, Döbringer’s text represents the only other text contemporary with or nearly contemporary with Fiore dei Liberi’s *Fior di Battaglia*, discussed in detail in the next chapter. A mere thirty or forty years separate the two: 1389, 1409-20. The “fencing” treatises of the sixteenth century are clearly civilian texts, designed for use in the Italian *scuola* or amongst the German *federfechten / marxbrüder*, are much more stylized, emphasizing unarmoured combat in light clothing. While rooted in combat martial practice, their exercise in a school environment over the course of a hundred and fifty or more years gradually moved them from their battlefield origins towards a martial sport.

In the text below, bold type denotes the original *zettel*. Finally, my own commentary follows, based on a blend of textual analysis and practical experience working with these techniques over a twenty-two year period. This analysis focuses only on the first part of the text, the portion that contains much of the “high level” cognitive and tactical advice that ties directly to my argument concerning the broader tradition of martial arts in the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance.

*Here begins Master Liechtenauer’s Art of fighting with the sword on foot and on horseback, in and out of armour.*

First, know that there is only one Art\textsuperscript{25} of the sword, and this Art may have been
developed hundreds of years ago. This Art is the foundation, the core of any fighting art.
Master [Johannes] Liechtenauer understood it and practiced it in its complete depth. It is
not the case that he invented the Art—as mentioned before—but he has travelled to many
lands, seeking to experience and to learn the real and true Art.

Here Döbringer asserts, uniquely, that the Liechtenauer did not invent the Art, but that the
Art existed for, “hundreds of years,” \textit{vor manche hundert jaren}. This assertion reinforces the use
of the preexisting kernel verse in RA MS I.33 examined in the last chapter, suggesting that
Liechtenauer, like the anonymous Priest, built his approach to the martial art upon and within a
much older framework, also probably recorded in mnemonic oral verse. As he writes, “this Art is
the foundation, the core of any fighting art.” Döbringer asserts that the verse encapsulates the
efficient core principles which have been, over many hundreds of years, applied to the dominant
technologies represented by hand shock weapons and effective defensive armour in and out of
armour, on foot and on horseback. In order to “experience and learn” variations as practiced near
and far, Döbringer claims that the old master Liechtenauer travelled to many lands in order to
practice it in its complete depth, also in that of Fiore.\textsuperscript{26} This claim of wide-spread travel and
learning may have been a formulaic method of securing legitimacy and credibility for the Art as
written, but it could equally be true. Without corresponding information, there is no way to know
for sure.\textsuperscript{27}

Also interesting is the use of the term, “art” itself. Recall from chapter two that the
medieval conception of Art was defined as knowledge of core principles that enable the artist to
adapt and apply the principles in new circumstances; in the words of John of Salisbury, “Art is a

\textsuperscript{25} I have capitalized “Art” because of the tone with which Döbringer takes in the text, which seems to
revere it.
\textsuperscript{26} Fiore dei Liberi, \textit{Fior di Battaglia}, Getty Ludwig XV 13, fol. 1r, \textit{Flos Duellatorum}, Pisani Dossi, Carta
\textsuperscript{27} Brian R. Price, “Birds of a Feather: Thematic Parallels of Chivalric Invocation in Ramon Lull and the
Fighting Treatises of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries” (International Congress of Medieval Studies,
Kalamazoo, 2004).
system that reason has devised in order to expedite, by its own short cut, our ability to do things within our natural capabilities…it [is] a concise, direct method of doing things that are possible.\footnote{28 John of Salisbury, Metalogicon, trans. by David D. McGarry, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1962, Book I, p. 33.}

The anonymous author of the I.33 treatise likewise referred to his approach as the *artem dimicatoriam*,\footnote{29 Anonymous, Royal Armouries MS I.33, plate 1.} while Döbringer uses the term, *eyne kunst*, one art, to describe it, and then offers the first instance of the phrase which will become associated with all later masters in the tradition, *kunst des fechtens*, when he writes, *kern aller kunsten des fechtens*, literally the “art of fighting,” but also translatable as the “art, school or skill of fencing.” As noted in chapter 2, *kunst* can be translated as art, skill, or school. *Fechten* can translate as “to battle,” “fighting” or “fencing.” While Liechtenauer did not invent the art of fighting—what I will boldly term the martial art—he did establish a firm platform for its development and will become the single authority for shock-weapon combat in the German school of fighting which will survive for more than three centuries. Fiore dei Liberi, writing in late fourteenth century Friulia, refers to his art similarly as the *arte d’armizare*.*\footnote{30 Fiore dei Liberi Fior di Battaglia, op. cit., Getty fol. 1r and Pisani-Dossi carta 2a.}

In both cases, we have encoded in the terminology the idea that these arts were collections of principles organized into a system. In the next section, he will talk about the core elements of that system. Döbringer continues his introduction on fol. 13v and onto 14r:

This true, authentic Art is about moving simply and directly towards the nearest target by the most efficient route. For example, if someone intends to strike or thrust, he moves as if a string were attached to the tip or edge <14r> of the sword, which would be pulled directly towards the adversary’s opening. This opening should be the closest target possible. This is why the same true fighting will never employ ornate, showy, or wide patterns, nor [will it include] exaggerated moves which are useful only for the entertainment of spectators.

There are some *Leychmeister* (false masters) who say they have invented a new Art, thinking that the Art of fighting will be improved day by day. I, however, would like to...
see one who can come up with a fighting technique or strike not part of Liechtenauer’s Art. Often they try to change a technique by simply assigning it a new name; many do this as they see fit. They also “invent” huge, wide swinging moves and parries, often using two or three strikes before the real one. All this because they seek the praise of uneducated people! They practice wide and pretty parries, swinging at the start of an engagement just for show, executing very long strikes slowly and clumsily. By doing this they miss and cannot quickly recover, thus easily exposing themselves. This is because they have insufficient control and measure when they fight; and this is not really a part of serious combat, but is rather for fighting in the school; but serious fighting moves simply and directly, straight and without hesitation, just like the string, everything exactly measured and calculated.

Lichtenauer’s *kunst des fechtens* is about efficiency, moving the tip of the sword not in the exaggerated circular movements common to many sporting arts, but rather on a direct flight-path designed to reduce the time necessary to strike the target. Fiore dei Liberi never discusses this point, but I have found the same approach encoded in the efficiency of Fiore’s progression from one fighting *posta or guardia* to another—the transitions are made from to the next, without the broad, sweeping motions that infuse instability and efficiency into the movement.\(^{31}\) By maintaining the flight-path of the weapon as directly as possible from point A to point B, without extra flourishes or extravagances, the combatant’s stability is preserved, he is faster, and it retains a solid fighting platform which is more flexibly and more quickly respond to the changing positions (*leger*, in the German system) of his opponent.

The above commentary also decries “false” masters—*Leychmeister*—who attempt to “invent” a new art in order to impress those who are ignorant. This suggests that Liechtenauer was not alone in his efforts to compile and refine the *kunst des fechten*, but, Döbringer suggests, he was the most successful because he “knew the whole art” and taught efficient principles “just like a string, everything exactly measured and calculated.” And presumably, Liechtenauer favored blows which were direct and taught as a tight string as well, “simply and directly, straight and without hesitation.” These are battlefield arts for use in fighting, “without limits,” as

Fiore writes—*a oltranza*—what Döbringer refers to as *ernst fechten*, or “fighting in earnest,” as opposed to fighting in a school, what he terms *schulfechten*.32

This idea of drawing a distinction between the arts of the school and the battlefield arts is of crucial importance to making a distinction between the first *fechtbücher* and the later ones. For the early treatises, including certainly the present one by Hanko Döbringer, dating from 1389, the emphasis is on direct, efficient movements, and upon the maximization of both power and precision. I call this *martial efficiency*. Power and bodily strength are critical elements of the earliest versions of these arts exemplified by both Döbringer’s exposition of Liechtenauer’s *kunst des fechten* and Fiore dei Liberi’s *arte d’armizare*. We can see similar movements expressed with less clarity in the various Gladiatoria manuscripts, and in the *Jeu de la Hache* treatise from Burgundy,33 but in general after 1450 the fight-books increasingly seem focused more on *schulfechten* than on *ernstfechten*, both in the German tradition and in the Italian schools. In these treatises, time or tempo is traded for strength or power. Guards are brought more forward, the feet may be drawn closer together or extended widely in an effort to secure speed of movement at the expense of stability. The civilian martial art established with the kernel verse preserved in RA MS I.33, seems to have developed alongside and perhaps interwoven with its cousin the military art. But the civilian art was eventually centered on fighting schools around Europe (who practiced *schulfechten*), becoming first the art and later the sport of fencing but becoming increasingly divorced from the battlefield origins of the art, where power and stability—the chivalric virtue of strength—was a pre-eminent virtue. Thus, the earlier treatises of Fiore dei Liberi and Hanko Döbringer represent a unique window into the military origins for the

32 Fiore dei Liberi op cit. Getty fol. 1r.
European martial art. Döbringer then continues on the theme of martial efficiency required for *ernstfechten*:

If one intends to strike or thrust at another who is before him, no indirect, wide or over-numerous attacks will work. If he wants to bring the fight to a quick end, and yet he hesitates or is slow, he would be better off leaving the *schantz* [the place of combat] altogether!

Therefore, he must strike first, (*vorschlag*), simply and directly at his opponent, to his head, body or to the nearest accessible target that is within range. He must do this quickly and dexterously. It is better to make one strike than four or six, and one should not spend precious time observing and analyzing. Also, move lightly and nimbly.

The *vorschlag* (*vor*, before) is a great advantage in fighting and you will hear more about it later in the text. Liechtenauer says that only five strokes, with their following techniques, are useful as opening (or entry) methods for fighting. <15r> He teaches these, according to the true Art, executed straight and simply to the nearest and most available target. By this approach he leaves all the useless work and the “newly invented” methods of the *Leychmeistere* that are falsely derived from his Art.

We see here Döbringer extending the theme of efficiency and directness; he is particularly writing against the *leychmeistere*, who “invent” “new” techniques which are inefficient—and thus not part of the Art—to distinguish themselves, and conceivably to attract lucrative teaching opportunities from students who know no better. Fiore also discusses “false masters,” who do not know the Art, and as he says, who challenged him to fight on no less than five occasions.34 Both masters seem to be referring a trend of poorly equipped teachers offering outdated or inefficient techniques to their students.35 Most importantly, these techniques, which use indirect and inefficient movements, or too many movements, are better off in the school, where flourishishes might attract the attention of those who fight for enjoyment and not necessarily

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34 Fiore dei Liberi, *op cit.*, fol. 1v.
35 This kind of exclusive protectionism is common to the medieval guild structure. In England, the Haumer’s Guild of London, in the City of London Letter Book from 21 Edward III, 1347, complained that “Also forasmuch as heretofore some persons coming in who are strangers have intermeddled and still do intermeddle in the making of helmetry, whereas they do not know the trade, by reason whereof many great men and others of the realm have been slain through their default....” reprinted in Appendix B, Charles Ffoulkes, *The Armourer and His Craft*, London: Methuen & Co., 1912, p. 171.
for martial self-defense. In short, they are a dangerous kind of ignorance, ill-preparing combatants to meet the use of deadly force within the lists (or conceivably, on the battlefield).

Interestingly, there is no mention of anything of the sort either in the RA MS I.33 manuscript or on the Burgundian Jeu de la Hache, perhaps given the different environments which these two texts were representing; the monastery or cathedral school environment for RA MS I.33 on one hand, and in the chivalric emprise style of feat of arms for the Burgundian Jeu on the other.

Döbringer ties this theme of efficiency to the concept of the vor, very loosely translated sometimes as the “before.” He emphasizes the absolute necessity of seizing the initiative from the very first, using athletic movements to strike directly to an opening, and like Fiore, he says it is better to make one strike than “four or six.” For Fiore, the First Master of Battle consists of finding and seizing this initiative also, using analysis of the opponent’s position—posta—to select a guardia of one’s own and then striking immediately (subito) for the opening, (but under cover, which he expresses as mi coverta). If the weapons then cross, because the scolaro has either struck for the opponent’s weapon in order to control it or if the opponent manages to make his own cover, the next tactical menu option is invoked to retain (or seize, in the case of the opponent) the initiative, the Second Master of Battle. Both masters would prefer that the find end in a single blow, not in a rain of blows hammering down upon the opponent, as modern

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36 Fiore suggests in his Prologio, that it is preferable to use what he calls the “First Master,” a position of both cover and advantage for striking the opponent, but that this might be met with various remedies or counters, what he terms the “Second” master. While there are also occasional references to a “Third” or even in a very few instances of “Fourth” master, carrying on the fight beyond a few blows carries substantial risks, benché pochi zogi passano lo terzo magistro in l’arte e se più si n’fano se fa cum periculo, “it is well that few plays pass the third master of the Art, because in this lies great peril.” Fiore dei Liberi, op cit., fol. 2r.

37 Fiore defines this again in the Prologio, on fol. 2r, when he defines how a posta or guardia are to be used, È guardia è tanto a dire che l’omo se guarda e se defende cum quella de la feride del suo inimigo, “And it is enough to say that the man who so guards and defends himself against wounding by his enemy.”

38 Ibid, fol. 2r. The cross or incrosa is discussed in the section pertaining to the sword in two hands, fols. 25r and 25v.
historians of medieval warfare tend to believe, nor as later schliefen techniques suggest, even in the German tradition.

One cannot really talk about fighting in a meaningful manner or explain it with written words, as some might like. You can show and teach it only through the hand. One must use all the senses and pay close attention to the Art, practicing it often in [ludic] play. This will make it ready for you when you fight faster and in earnest, because Practice is better than Art; your Practice may very well be useful without Art, but your Art is useless without Practice.

This is a fascinating paragraph that sets parameters for practice and for the relationship of the Art as practiced within the school (schulfechten) with that practiced in earnest (in ernst). This is a sophisticated prescription that identifies roles for ludic play and for fighting when the combat is potentially mortal. For Döbringer, the ludic play of the fechtschule is important because the Art cannot be learned from a book, but only through practice. Compare this with the sentiments expressed by the mid-fourteenth century French knight, Geoffrey de Charny, who writes,

And when they are old enough and have reached the stage when they can do so, they do not seek advice nor do they believe anyone who wants to counsel them against bearing arms at the first opportunity, and from that time forward, on more and more occasions; and as they increase in years, so they increase in prowess and skill in the arms of arms (faits d’armes) in peace and in war. And they themselves, through their great zeal and determination, learn the true way to practice the military arts….

Earlier, de Charny refers to how the different kinds of practice are related, when he speaks of deeds of arms done in tournaments, “…For this kind of practice of arms…enable them to perform so well that they achieve in this activity such great renown for their fine exploits, and because they often engage in it…indeed they are worthy of praise…” The idea of a tournament as ludic play is well established in the literature on medieval knighthood, and we saw this in the

40 Ibid., p. 87.
41 See chapter 2, note 40.
previously “ludic” character of the sword and buckler treatise. This idea seems to have a direct parallel also in the combative arts taught in the fechtschule, where “doing” is thought to be of more value than “thinking” about the problem. Döbringer’s beautiful phrase at the close of the paragraph neatly sums up his point, “Practice is better than Art; your Practice may very well be useful without Art, but your Art is useless without Practice.” It is reminiscent of a phrase passage in the ad Herennium, often used at the time to teach grammar, “In every discipline artistic theory is of little avail without unremitting exercise…theory is almost useless unless made good by industry.” Following this theme, Döbringer delves immediately into the practical details that experience will teach. These elements are, again, not in the Liechtenauer verse itself, and the extensive, detailed gloss strongly suggests a close familiarity with Johannes Liechtenauer himself:

A good swordsman should first grip his sword safely and in a secure manner using both hands between the cross and the pommel, which is safer than having one hand on the pommel. The strikes will be harder and more accurate in case the pommel overthrows itself, coming in behind the strike. The results are much more powerful compared to having one hand at the pommel and drawing the strike. Such a draw is less perfect and less strong, because a sword is like a set of scales; (15v) if the blade is large and heavy, the pommel must also be heavy, just like a set of scales.

This is practical advice dealing with the grip and the generation of (and preference for) power. Similar sections are not found in the later glosses, and I believe that this is the only treatise to go into detail about how the blows are thrown. Döbringer firmly opposes the idea of a “draw cut.” Indeed, we see comments made directly about maximizing power, “the strikes will be harder and more accurate” and “the results are more powerful,” while the draw, “is less perfect and less strong….” He speaks also of the weapon’s balance, how it needs to be, “like a

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set of scales: if the blade is large and heavy, the pommel must also be heavy.” In grip, he seems to recommend keeping the hand in front of the pommel in order to better leverage the strike. This advice is the same as is presented in the iconography of Fiore’s treatise.\textsuperscript{43} Following the grip, Döbringer next moves to footwork, blending it with more tactical advice on the mental aspects of a combat encounter:

> When it comes to fighting one against the other, the combatant should be aware of the opponent’s steps, but must also be secure and well-disciplined with his own, just like he too was standing on scales. He must be able to step backwards or forwards, as appropriate, proving himself adaptive, treading sparingly, quickly, nimbly. His fighting must be accomplished with confidence and a resolute attitude, with wit and common sense, and without fear. You will learn about that later.

> One needs control and measure when fighting, as appropriate. One should not step too far forwards or back, or he will lose time in the recovery. He must make appropriate steps. It is often advisable to make two small steps instead of one longer one, and it often proves necessary to make a little run with many small steps. But an explosive step or a jump is often necessary.

> While details of the footwork are not provided, the Döbringer’s interpretation of Liechtenauer’s Art involves, as does Fiore, simple steps forward and back. These might be taken to be parallel or similar to Fiore’s advancing/retreating steps (\textit{acresare}, \textit{decresare}), and his broader passing steps (\textit{passare}, \textit{tornare}).\textsuperscript{44} Döbringer recommends small steps, “One should not step too far forwards or back or he will lose time in the recovery.” The idea is to preserve the combatant’s movement potential as much as possible, occasionally driving boldly forward but preserving control and measure.

\textsuperscript{43} There is no written passage in the Fiore dei Liberi treatises that relates either to grip or to the preference for power over a drawing cut. However, Fiore uses the verb, \textit{colpire}, to describe his strikes, which translates to “strike” or “blow,” rather than \textit{tagliare}, “to cut.” \textit{Tagliare} is used only in a very few places in the text. However, Fiore does illustrate the grip in many depictions, and his drawings match Döbringer’s descriptions. In addition, Fiore fully harnesses the turning of the body, and while not detailed in the text (core kinesthetics are not written out, but are rather encoded in the drawings), it is clear that the large muscle groups are efficiently harnessed any time a blow is delivered with either the edge or point.

\textsuperscript{44} There is only a single descriptive paragraph that discusses the footwork in Fiore’s treatise. In the Getty treatise, it is found on fol. 22r, and it is omitted from the other four versions of the work altogether. I present an expanded and illustrated analysis of the footwork in Brian R. Price, \textit{Sword in Two Hands}, op. cit, pp. 106-117.
The ideas of “control” and “measure” in fighting reflect Fiore’s advice in the *segno*—explained in more detail in the next chapter—where the *cervino* or lynx holds a pair of dividers and the accompanying text also emphasizes this first principle of controlling distance.\(^{45}\) All of Döbringer’s prescriptions in the two paragraphs above revolve around this principle, controlling distance and measure through “many small steps” coupled with an occasional “explosive step or jump.”

What one intends to do for leisure or in earnest should be made deceptively, in order to shield the intent from the opponent’s eyes. Then, if the combatant gets to him, knowing the measure and thinking the opponent can reach him, he should hurry into the entry without fear, nimbly, going for the head or body and not worrying about hits or misses. He does this in order to win the *vorschlag*, so as not to let the adversary bring his own fight. About this you will learn more in the general teachings (that follow).

Once again, we have a presentation of a core principle in the *vorschlag* (*vor*, “before” and *schlag*, “impact”), an expression of initiative and control, concepts central to any martial or military art. The literal terms may be taken to mean “striking first,” but I suspect there is more in the concept than merely striking first—the idea is to first seize control, the “striking” encompassing not only physical attacks but anything that comprises a combat movement made in earnest in order to seize the initiative. I find this idea of *vorschlag* paralleled also in the Fiorean interpretation of the Art, where every effort is made to win the fight through the First Master of Battle, but following the failure of this attempt by either combatant, the *vorschlag* must be and may be retrieved by either combatant who simply drives through the encounter and makes an appropriate follow-on. In many places Fiore writes that these actions must be done with immediacy, *subito*, and there are strong conceptual parallels between Fiore’s acting *subito* and Liechtenauer’s *vor*. Both masters advise seizing and holding the initiative as the paramount martial objective.

\(^{45}\) Fiore dei Liberi, *Fior di Battaglia*, op cit., Getty fol. 32r; *Flos Duellatorum* carta 17a, Florius *L’Arte Luctandi*, fol. 1r.
Additionally, the prescription is made to act deceptively, an idea reflected in the fifteenth century text of Filippo Vadi, loosely based on Fiore’s own *Fior di Battaglia*.\(^\text{46}\) While Fiore himself does not discuss deception per se, likely because the essence of the Art has he understood it was to drive through the opponent’s defenses and seize the initiative directly, flowing around or through the opponent’s defenses depending upon how they manifest as the entry or initial contact is made. This is encompassed in the martial virtue Fiore terms *audatia* or *ardimento*, which he associates with the lion.\(^\text{47}\) Döbringer too calls for bold decisiveness in the entry, advising him to “hurry into the entry without fear, nimbly, going for the head or body and not worrying about misses.” Next, he will talk about the main targets:

Preferably, one should aim for the upper and lower openings [above the hands or arms, or the waist if the sword is held in *Ochs*, point descending], above the cross and not below. All fighting is safer in the upper openings because they are easier to reach than are the lower openings, except when the lower opening is closer—but this doesn't happen too often.

Here we see a direct parallel that is expressed in one of Fiore dei Liberi’s plays, namely, that attacks should be made above the hands. In Fiore’s tactical section for the sword in two hands, on Getty fol. 26r, m. 158, he writes, *Quando uno te trà per la gamba, discresse lo pè ch’è denanzi o tu lo torna indredo e trà del fendente per sua testa come qui depento*, “When one comes against you for the leg, draw back the front foot or return it to the back and give a strike for his head as depicted.” Essentially, Fiore does not counsel striking for the legs at all because of *grande pericolo*, except *se uno fosse cazudo in terra*, “if one has fallen to the ground”—which would entail, as Döbringer says, “when the lower opening is close,” which would be the case in a fall, or if the opponent was standing above one on an obstacle, such as a wall or a table. We saw


\(^{47}\) See Fiore dei Liberi op cit., segno illustrations in three of the four manuscripts. The term *audatia* is found in the Pisani-Dossi and Florius manuscripts, while the Getty uses the term *ardimento*.
this principle also called out in the RA MS I.33 manuscript, in the discussion of the First Guard, where the Priest advised, “...and to attack the lower part will be dangerous to his head.” So the advice is an extension of the principle to strike for the closest opening, which all three masters seem to recognize as part of the Art.

Know also that one should move to the right side with his attacks instead of moving directly in to the front, because, when one knows this method, practicing and succeeding in doing this with weapons or in grappling, he will certainly not be a bad fighter [eyner bozer fechter].

Further, Döbringer states what Fiore only shows, that is, a preference for moving to the opponent’s right side, since the right hand will be the primary hand and the left hand a dangerous secondary weapon unto itself. Neither master says why such a movement is advantageous or preferred, but my practical experience has been that, by driving or “jamming” into the weapon before it has a chance to build up power, it can be more effectively intercepted in terms of both position and power. By position, because the covering device—be it a buckler, sword, dagger, arm or polearm—can cover more close to the weapon’s point of origin. By power, because the incoming strike does not have as long to develop, and hence develops less power. In grappling, Fiore’s preference for capturing the right arm, and controlling his opponent’s whole body thereby, puts the opponent’s left hand further away and can essentially neutralize it because it ends up on the other side of the opponent’s body. The opponent’s body is used as a shield against the secondary weapon of the left hand. Fiore does not mention this, but the whole of his close play (zogho stretto) with the sword in two hands, and the sword in one hand, both go in all cases

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49 Fiore dei Liberi shows this in several of his zogho largo or “wide” plays (read zogho for the modern Italian gioco).
50 My concept of jamming the weapon comes directly from an observation made by one the instructors within our school, Andrew Borman, who first articulated the observation in 2005. It has since turned out to represent a key principle for all of my zogho stretto or “close play” interpretations of Fiore.
to the right, instead of to the left. 51 All of this is neatly encapsulated with Döbringer’s elegant instruction to “move to the right side.”

<16v>

Know also that when one wishes to fight in earnest, he should see a ready technique, any one he likes, that is complete and correct. He should take this seriously, taking it into both mind and will, just as if he were to say, “that, I meant to do.” And then he must gain the initiative. With the help of God, it will not fail. He will succeed in doing what he should do, if he bravely and quickly attacks in the Vor. More about that you will often hear below.

This is an extremely difficult paragraph to translate. The first sentence, literally der vasse im eyn vertik stocke vor wel her wil das do gancz und gerecht sey und neme im das ernstlich un stete, suggests that the combatant see (in eyn) potential for a technique in the vor, taking any one that is complete (gancz) and “correct” (gerecht) for the situation. In other words, an option that lies within the principles of the Art. Essentially, this means making a good choice before the opponent makes one. One must see the opportunity, analyze it, act, and reanalyze. Critically, the combatant seizes the initiative by directing the fight with well-chosen technique, “that, I meant to do.” He directs and controls the outcome. This concept of vor, or acting in the “before,” is, I believe, very good medieval analogue for modern tactical theory regarding combat tempo. 52

Neither Fiore dei Liberi nor Fillippo Vadi write much about this crucial aspect. For them, the seizure of control is present, but time is seen in a different way. Fiore does not write about

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51 Fiore presents his “close play” or zogho stretto plays in the Getty on fols. 28r – 30v, although owing to the close distance his zogho stretto also includes core principles presented in the dagger section, found on fols. 9r – 18v and the out-of-place fols. on 38r and 38v. I have noticed that the majority of the zogho stretto plays will work driving directly towards the opponent, but that more control is achieved by going obliquely towards the opponent’s right side. Thus, this is a preference of the masters but not an unbreakable rule, as he says when he writes, “when one knows this method, practicing and succeeding with weapons or with grappling, he will certainly not be a bad fighter,” colorfully rendered as eyner bozer fechter.

52 This is, interestingly, the same thinking that underlies much modern theory of combat tempo based on Lt. Col. John Boyd’s OODA loop and his study of warfare in his Patterns of Conflict briefings. For the best exposition, see Frans Osinga, Science, Strategy and War: The Strategic Theory of John Boyd. Strategy and history, London: Routledge, 2006.
time at all. For Vadi, the most advantageous tempo is *mezo tempo*, or “middle time.”53 Sadly, students of Italian swordsmanship must wait for Angelo Viggiani, c. 1575, for a full exposition of the Italian conception of time.54 Owing to the very great amount of time separating Fiore and Viggiani—more than 150 years—we cannot be sure that Fiore’s conception of time was similar. There is no less emphasis on control in Fiore’s treatise, but the control is secured through the primary weapon, rather than through time; this is the reason that Fiore’s plays take place from the crossed swords position, where he gains the cross in order to secure both information about commitment and control.

Heretofore, Döbringer has been writing what amounts to a prologue that discusses the key elements of Johannes Liechtneauer’s martial art. The *fechtmeister’s* art itself follows, and Döbringer begins to gloss each section of the rhyming mnemonic.

<17r>

All fighting requires the help of righteous God.
A straight and healthy body, a complete and well-crafted sword.
*Vor, Nach, Weich, Hart: Indes* are the words you must remember.
Strikes, thrusts, cuts, presses, guards, parries, shoves, feeling, pulling,
Winding and Hanging, moving in and out; swipes, jumps, grabs, grapples.
Wisdom and courage, carefulness, deceit and wit,
Measure, concealment, sense, foresight, skillfulness.
Practice and joy, movement, agility, good steps.

This verse contains your foundational principles, and should permeate your whole Art of fighting (*kunst des fechten*). You should carefully observe these and what you will later read or hear about them, what each of these lines means and the principles it encompasses. [The] fighter (*ffechter*), understands this so the complete Art will be revealed to you through the whole sword and many good covers.

Now Döbringer provides either a lost verse of Liechtenauer, or an original verse of his own. Liechtenauer’s own text begins with his “key” or directions, but this text does not appear in versions of the *zettel* of Paulus Kal or in that of Sigmund Ringeck. Döbringer cites within the

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53 Filippo Vadi, op. cit, fol. 13v.
text an encapsulated version of the entire system, prepared as an introduction. He states that these are foundational principles (*fundament principia*), and that each will be enumerated in the verses that follow. This idea of fundamental principles harkens back to Aristotelian conceptions of Art, as each technical principle will be illuminated through a technique, a play (*zogho*, in the Italian of Fiore dei Liberi). In fact, neither of the next two verses appears in other copies of the surviving *zettel*, which in later texts always begins with the material on 18r.\textsuperscript{55}

\textit{Motus} (motion, movement); the word alone is the heart and crown of all fighting. In all of fighting, the \textit{articles} of the above foundation will be quickly understood. Always stay in motion and do not hesitate when beginning the fight. Work accurately and courageously, increasing your speed with every move. [Come with] one overwhelming rush, without pause, so that your opponent cannot strike. It will rob him of his will, injuring him because he cannot escape without being struck; but you can still get away.

After the Teaching, which is written here, I tell you truthfully; No one defends with safety. If you learn this, he will not come to strike.

Liechtenauer’s *kunst des fechten* is based on an overwhelming advance that keeps the opponent off-balance, disabling his ability to strike, or even his ability to think coherently. The similarity to modern technological warfare theory is striking.\textsuperscript{56} The advice is not to rush in blindly, but as we have seen in the previous section (16v), judgment tempers the drive into and potentially through the opponent in “one overwhelming rush, without pause, so that your opponent cannot strike.”

This very same thinking seems to underlie Fiore dei Liberi’s approach, where the key attribute of \textit{audatia}, presented in Fiore’s *segno* by the lion, is augmented by \textit{celeritas} (speed), represented by the tiger and yet built upon the \textit{stabilitas} of the elephant and governed by the

\textsuperscript{55} I have, in fact, not seen it in any of the later texts.

\textsuperscript{56} John Boyd, op. cit.
judgment and measure of the lynx.⁵⁷ But Fiore’s preference for audacity and drive is pronounced in the final Latin poem of his Prologue that survives only in the Pisani-Dossi manuscript:

Armorum actus sit e delectat, amice,
Nosceret, tecum habeus totum quod carmina monstrant.
Sis audax ui atque animus nec senix adesto;
Nil menti sit timor; ades, perficere posses.
Huius in exemplum mulier sit; pauida nunquam
Nudum expectaret gladium, formidine capta.
Sic homo formidans ut femina nulla ualebit;
Deforet et totum, cordis si audatia deesset;
Audatia et uitrus talis consistit in arte.

If you want to know about deeds of arms, my friend,
Learn all that these verses demonstrate.
Be audacious and mentally bold, rather than old.
Banish fear from your spirit; show bravery.
A good example is a woman; fearful, never will she
Stand against a drawn sword, so taken with panic is she.
Therefore a fearful man is the same as a woman; of little worth.
Like her he lacks boldness of heart;
Audacity and virtue that makes this art.⁵⁸

Today we might well object to the association of boldness with men exclusively, but the main point is that fear must be driven from the heart and replaced with boldness, courage, audacity. The poem is not repeated in any of the other surviving treatises on Fiore’s arte d’armizare; perhaps it was a more youthful preference for boldness over the calculation and precision that seems to characterize his later treatises.

Döbringer adds considerably more, emphasizing the need for “constant motion” (frequens motus):

To begin, learn to maneuver (frequens motus) according to the teaching of the Art, which paralyzes your adversary at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of all fights. You should strive to execute the beginning, middle and end all in one, without break, without being stifled by your opponent. Under no circumstances let him gain the opportunity to strike. This is the meaning of the two words vorschlag and

⁵⁷ Fiore dei Liberi’s segno, op. cit. in note 27 above.
⁵⁸ Fiore dei Liberi Flos Duellatorum, “Pisani Dossi” manuscript, Prologue, carta 2b.
nachschlag, striking him as one and it should deceive him before he has [sic] even moved.

Döbringer breaks the fight up into three parts: the beginning (the entry), the middle (the engagement), and the end (the resolution), and he advises the combatant to open by seizing the initiative, driving without pause in the vor until the fight is finally resolved. He is explicit, “under no circumstances let him gain the opportunity to strike.” Döbringer, like Fiore, seeks maximum safety for his combatants, and for combatants of the kunst des fechten, this means unrelenting assault, or at least unrelenting maneuver.

When he speaks of vorschlag—striking first—and nachschlag, we can perhaps see a strong parallel in Fiore’s system. The “first strike,” like Fiore’s First Master of Battle, strikes for advantage and strives to seize and maintain the initiative until the fight has been resolved. But sometimes the opponent does manage to strike, and in these cases the retrieval of the initiative is even more crucial, because the combatant is in danger himself of being overwhelmed and losing his freedom of action. For Fiore, this concept is the principle that underlies the Second Master of Battle, which entails first gaining cover against the incoming strike, dulling it, and immediately (subito) striking back.59 Speed and urgency are of the utmost importance in this case, as it will prove for the kunst des fechten, which Döbringer will comment on at length following Liechtenauer’s Prologue that follows:

<18r>
This is a general introduction to unarmoured fighting on foot, so remember this:
Young knight learn, to love God and revere women, so that your honor may grow.
Practice chivalry and learn the arts which will adorn as well as serving in war.
Grapple well; manfully bear axe, spear, sword and dagger.
Learn to defeat these in the hands of others.
Strike quickly and hurry towards him, rushing in, regardless of hits or misses.
In order that you take honor from him before the judges.

59 Fiore dei Liberi, op. cit., fol. 2r.
Be prepared for this: All Art has length and measure.
Whatever you want to do, do with good and common sense.
In earnest or in play, have a light heart but avoid overconfidence.
As you must see and observe with a high spirit.
Whatever you can use, plan it into your next move against him.
Confronted with courage and strength, every opponent will hesitate.
Never give your opponent any advantage over you.
Avoid needless risk; against four or six one should not advance.
Avoid overconfidence; maintain balance, this will serve you well.
It is a courageous man who can stand against one of his own stature.
And it carries no shame, against four or six, to flee from the fight.

Here are the general teachings for the sword
If you want to demonstrate the Art, move left and strike right.
And strike left with right, if you intend to fight strongly.
He who moves after the strike shows no Art.
Attack him as you like, no Wechsler will harm you.
Never strike to the sword, but always to openings;
To the head or body, not shunning the Zeckrühr.
Fight with your whole body if you want to fight strongly.
And this is bad: never fight from the upper left when you are [on the] right.
And if you are on the left, you will lack [power] on the right.
It is better to fight down from your upper left.
Vor, Nach: these are two things which are the source of the whole Art.
Schwäche and Stärke; Indes, this you must remember.
So you will learn to defend yourself through Art and labor.
If you frighten easily, you will never understand fighting.
Courage and quickness, carefulness, wit and intelligence,
Sense, stealth, measure, foresight, grace and skill,
Fighting needs all of this to be ready in the mind.60

The commentary follows (glossa generalis huius sequitur):

First learn and know that the ort (location, place) of the sword is its center, its method
and heart. All techniques begin and end with an ort, (a place); thus the hängen and the
winden have a beginning, then turn around middle—many good fighting techniques stem
from this.

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60 This is the merkeverse or zettel that is often reproduced in the Liechtenauer system. Versions of it with
commentary form the body of the work by Sigmund Ringeck, Sächsische Landesbibliothek Dresden, MS Dresden
C487, c. 1440; Peter von Danzig, Biblioteca dell’Academica Nazionale dei Lincei e Corsiana, Rome, Cod. 44 A 8
(Cod. 1449), 1452; and Paulus Kal, Bayerisches Staatsbibliothek Munichen, CGM 1507, c. 1450-80. See also Martin
Wierschin, Meister Johann Liechtenauers Kunst des Fechtens, Münchener Texte und Untersuchungen zur
Deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters, Bd. 13. München: Beck, 1965, where the version included in the Peter von
Danzig manuscript, Biblioteca dell’Academica Nazionale dei Lincei e Corsiana, Rome, Cod. 44 A 8 (Cod. 1449),
1452, is well analyzed.
From this it has been discovered that a combatant who immediately strikes at the ort, and yet who fails to strike immediately, may employ the before-mentioned techniques in combination with strikes, thrusts and cuts, stepping in and out, or leaping, in order to strike the opponent. If someone pushes his ort too far out with a thrust or lunge, may recover it by employing the winden or stepping out, so that he may again use appropriate fighting techniques and principles. Once recovered, he may again strike, thrust or cut, because according to Liechtenauer’s Art, these all stem from foundational principles.

The verse given is the same as we find in other fechtmeister who use the merkeverse as their core, as noted above. Given that it is commented upon by both Peter von Danzig and Sigmund Ringeck, and these commentaries in turn have been further expanded by modern students of the Liechtenauer’s kunst des fechten, there is little point in reinterpreting them here.61 But the Döbringer hausbüch is the first instance where the verse is recorded. What is interesting is that the verse states explicitly that it pertains to unarmoured fighting—bloßfechten—not to fighting in armour.

Döbringer himself first comments on the position of the sword, what he terms the ort, the sword’s place in space. But interestingly, this idea of ort or position does not seem to be expressed in the verse itself; I am uncertain from whence it comes. Döbringer says that all techniques begins and ends with a place, which is something perhaps akin to Fiore’s poste, or positions. In Fiore, movements all begin, end and transition through known guardie or positions, and this may parallel Döbringer’s concept of ort, or place. Both conceptions of movement and space are fundamentally Aristotelian, where movement is comprised of an infinite number of points bound by end-points. Each of these points is or can be the ort of the sword. Additionally, there is the important observation that rotating the sword, turning it around its middle, are

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fundamental to core techniques such as the *winden* and *hängen*, which also serve as retrieval techniques should the combatant find himself expended.

The concept of *stabilitàs*, where the sword is supported by the body, is also expressed here. The idea is not to extend too far, and if you do, to quickly recapture the support by stepping forward under the sword or by winding (*winden*) the sword to a better supported position, as from *langenort* to *ochs*, “Once recovered, he may again strike, thrust or cut, because according to Liechtenauer’s Art, these all stem from foundational principles.” Döbringer continues:

Later you will hear how one technique stems from a principle, and how they may be used in succession, so that if one method is defended, another may hit and thus succeed.

Hidden in this little sentence, Döbringer hints at the algorithmic nature common to the Art as expressed by all three masters. Both medieval approaches are built around the seizure of the initiative, expressed in the *kunst du fechten* as the *vorschlag*, and in the Italian *arte d’armizare* as the Fiore’s First Master of Battle. But all three expressions recognize that one technique may be countered (*remedii*, in Fiore’s system), but that this in turn will create other openings which can be exploited by another technique within the system (*contra-remedii*, in Fiore).62 This was seen previously in RA MS I.33, where each guard was countered by a guard of its own, for example, the first guard, “underarm,” was countered in the verse by *halbschil* and *langort*, while the Priest added *krucke* and added that it could be countered by any of the seven original guards. There is an important element of flexibility and adaptability within the approach that underscores the longevity of martial arts practice in Europe.

Secondly, you must learn that there is nothing about the sword which has been invented without reason. A [good] fighter should make use of the *ort* [point],63 of both edges, the

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62 *Remedii* and *contra-remedii* are introduced in Fiore’s Prologue, Getty fol. 2r.
63 In this instance I am rendering *ort* as point; in Aristotelian thinking a point is a position, and a position is a point. Therefore, I find a dual use for the term that has complicated previous efforts to make sense of the manuscript.
hilt and the pommel. (19v) Each of these has special methods in the art of fighting. How to practice this, you will hear later.

Like Fiore, Döbringer counsels that the whole of the sword may be used as a weapon—strikes are later included with the point, with both edges (beide sneiden), the cross (hilcze), and pommel (klos). Fiore also uses both edges (taglia falsa and taglia dritta), the point (punta), cross (croce), and pommel (pomo). The edges themselves are further discussed below, where the Italian concept of a “true” edge (taglia dritta) may be compared with the strong or long edge, (langen schneide), while the false edge (taglia falsa) may be compared with the weak or short edge (kurzen schneide) in the German expression.64

Also, know and learn, with the verse that begins, “If you want to show the art, etc.” that a skilled combatant (kunstlicher fechter) should place his left foot in front and strike from the right side directly at the opponent.

This is a fundamental kinesthetic expression of power generation. Using this formula, with a right-handed combatant has his left foot forward, thus coiling with power his right hip. The strongest, most direct strike for most “skilled” or “artful” (kunstlicher) combatants will be a strike from the right, what Fiore terms a fendente.65 Were power not a primary consideration of the system, one would begin with the right foot forward, because strikes could be made more quickly, as was advocated by the Italian masters as early as with the aforementioned Filippo Vadi.66 And indeed, we see this configuration as dominant for all later fencing systems where power is not a consideration, beginning in the very earliest period with Achille Marozzo (1536, Opera Nova) in the Italian and with Joachim Meyer (1570, Gründtliche Beschreibung…der Kunst des Fechtens), if not earlier. In experimenting with Fiore’s system, the arte d’armizare, that power is inversely proportional to the weapon’s travel time. In other words, the further back

65 Fiore dei Liberi, op. cit., Getty fol. 23r.
66 Filippo Vadi, op. cit., fol. 17v.
the weapon is carried, the more power is generated, but the longer it takes to arrive. Not only is this fundamental physics, but the principle explains why, when power is not a critical component of the combat system—as in many combat sports where a touch is sufficient to score a point—the guards drift forward. Classical and sport fencing represent the ultimate expressions of this principle; any touch registers a hit through the electronic scoring system, and thus, time to target is of paramount importance, and the guards are as far forward as may be maintained while preserving balance and stability. So the essence of this section is that the *kunst des fechten* is based on the efficient delivery of powerful strikes. It is based on power. I posit that power is one of the key elements of technique that separates fencing technique from the martial arts that preceded them. There is more added to this point after the next sentence, which briefly introduces fighting distance:

He should use threatening strikes to determine where he may hit the opponent and where he may reach with a step.

This is akin to testing the distance between the combatants, and Fiore expresses this concept loosely in the first play of his *zogho largo* with the sword in two hands. At extreme distance, the combatants lightly test to gain a sense or measure of the distance and intentions of their opponent. Also important is that the fighting distance is defined as the distance at which the opponent may be struck with a step. Since the left foot is forward, and since illustrations of a successful strike, both in the Liechtenauer tradition and in Fiore dei Liberi’s *Fior di Battaglia*, show the right foot forward, we may infer that the step is usually, though not always, a passing step. While the *kunst des fechten* does not name this step, at least not in the medieval period, Fiore refers to it as a *passare*. This was also true in RA MS I.33, where most strikes were shown accompanied by a passing step. Thus, we know that to deliver a strike as recommended by both

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67 Fiore dei Liberi, op. cit., fol. 25r.
Döbringer, Fiore, and the anonymous author of RA MS I.33, a step usually accompanies the strike.

And when he [Liechtenauer] says, “if you intend to fight strongly,” he means that you should fight from the left side with the whole body and with all your strength, to the head or body or whatever may be hit. Never strike to the sword only, but work as you would if he had no weapon or as if you could not see it.

By “fighting from the left side,” Döbringer must mean with the body coiled, with the left foot forward for a right-handed combatant. He says explicitly, “fight from the left side with the whole body and with all your strength,” by which he means to use the large muscle groups to power the weapon. Importantly, one should never strike to the weapon, but rather through it, driving through any defense and overwhelming it or reaching the target with sufficient power to do damage, in or out of armour.

Do not avoid following any contact with the sword, [but rather] be permanently in motion, laboring for contact, so the opponent cannot strike.

This sentence expresses the principle of maintaining the initiative by staying in the vor, the “before,” even after contact. By “following” contact with the sword (zu keyn), one “follows on” with contact on the sword immediately with another technique in order to retain the initiative. Fiore has this also, further defining his menu of the cinque cose—the five things—which may be used to follow-on with contact. These are the strikes, disarms, breaks, binds or throws (mettere in terra). While the kunst des fechten has a different set of menu items, Döbringer above explicitly discusses the principle of “following on” once contact with the weapon is made. Moreover, he indicates that one should “labor for contact,” (zem...keyn) in order that the opponent cannot strike. For Fiore, this is represented by the incrosare, the crossing

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Fiore defines the cinque cose in his Prologue, op. cit., fol. 2r.
of the swords. In the *kunst des fechten*, this is expressed as *binden*, a bind. From this important state, Liechtenauer will discuss the feeling through the swords, *sentimento di ferro* in the Italian; *fühlen* in the German. A great deal more will be said about this later and commentaries upon *binden* and *fühlen* characterize the later works where the *merkeverse* is glossed, so important is it considered by the author Döbringer.

He also means that one should neither follow nor step right with an attack, but always a little sideways, a little obliquely, in order to come to his flank. In that position the combatant can strike him much easier using any method when compared to confronting him directly. Whatever he throws at his opponent, he would then not find it defended by *durchwechsel* or other technique, strikes or thrusts, directed to the opponent’s openings (*blossen*)—especially the head or body using oblique steps or other footwork.

This advice is fairly straight-forward. One should, ideally, move obliquely, striving towards the opponent’s flank. This is a restatement, to a degree, of the advice given on fol. 16r; on the oblique, any thrust or strike may find an easier path towards an opening. The *durchwechsel*, or sliding of the point out from under the opponent’s sword in a bind—discussed below in fol. 34v.—is also harder or negated by moving obliquely. Fiore’s techniques also prefer to step to the right side, where the combatant may be able to get in behind the opponent’s sword, what I term *redoppiando*, “redoubling” (this idea is drawn from Fiore’s *daga* material).

(20r) Know and learn also that when he says, “*Vor, nach*: these two…,” here he means five words: *vor*, *nach*, *schwach*, *stark*, and *indes*. Within these words lies the complete Art of Master Liechtenauer, and these are the basic foundation and core of all fighting, on foot or on horseback, in or out of armour.

By the word “*vor*” (before) he means that every good fighter must gain the *vorschlag*, regardless of whether his strike hits or misses. And when Liechtenauuer says, “Strike and hurry to the man, drive in…,” me means that as soon as he approaches the opponent by stepping or running, he will instantly attack as soon as the opponent is in reach with either a step or a spring. He must then attack to the head or body, without hesitation, to the opening he can best strike. In gaining the *vorschlag* it is unimportant if the blow

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69 The incrosa are presented in the sword in two hands section of the manuscript, in the Getty fols. 25r and 25v (for the *zogho largo*) and in 28r (for the *zogho stretto*).
70 Fiore introduces the *redoppiandi* in the dagger section of the Getty. The execution of the *redoppiando* is explained in Brian R. Price, *Sword in Two Hands*, op. cit., pp. 222-4.
injures the adversary or not. He must be certain of the correct measure of his steps, that they are neither too long nor too short.

Döbringer summarizes the core of the *kunst des fechten* here, and we can begin to see how the theory of maneuver (*frequens motens*) derives from a consideration of the supreme importance for maintaining the initiative (*vorschlag*). Once again, Döbringer emphasizes, as if he cannot say it enough, the importance of maintaining the initiative (*vorschlag*) by driving first (before, *vor*), in order to control the fight. Again, these paragraphs stress the importance of striking first in the *kunst des fechten*, and this principle is maintained intact through the nearly two centuries of masters working within the tradition. In the Italian, Fiore’s First Master of Battle concept is barely articulated, but I believe this concept firmly lies within the intent of the fight as presented from the twelve key *guardie* within the system. One selects a *posta* for its potential for positional advantage; he then attempts to strike at the opponent. As Döbringer says above, it does not matter if the first strike severely injures the opponent or not. At the very least it provides a discomfiting point, after which he must again reorient, and start his decision cycle all over again. For Fiore, this driving for first is perhaps not so pronounced, and this is one of the distinguishing points between the two interpretations of the medieval Art. Fiore seems to prefer contact in order to better secure his own cover before driving in with a follow-on using one of the “five things,” while the *kunst des fechten* seems to drive powerfully into the thick of the fight. It is saying too much to argue that Fiore is defensive—he is not—and that the *kunst des fechten* is offensive; but certainly the offense as envisioned by Liechtenauer emphasizes the attack more than does Fiore.

By way of a short insertion, Döbringer reiterates the importance of maintaining stability and balance in this drive forward. This is a good place to insert the reminder, right after strongly
encouraging students to “drive in” (rawsche, “rush”); very often, students lose their feet or their stability in their entry.

If he succeeds in striking in the vorschlag, he must instantly follow through with the hit. (20v) If, however, the opponent defends (or makes cover) so that he turns aside or covers the attack—be it a strike or thrust—away from the intended opening using his sword, he will now, while the swords are still in contact, use feeling (fühlen) and gain awareness about whether the opponent is soft or hard in the bind.

Assuming that the combatant has struck first, whether on or off of the opponent’s blade, he must use this state of crossed swords (binden, in the German; incrosare in the Italian) to immediately ascertain the nature of the contact. This feeling, expressed as fühlen, is crucial. Döbringer introduces the two key states a bind may take, one “hard” (hart), one “weak” (weich). This principle is absolutely critical to understanding both techniques and tactics of both Liechtenauer’s Art and of Fiore’s arte d’armizare, although Fiore does not clearly articulate the concept. The nature of the binden or incrosa depends upon position and the strength of the contact between the weapons. Helpfully, Döbringer discusses this point in detail, which is crucially important, since his passages on these points are the most detailed of any within the Liechtenauer tradition, and Fiore reminds his students of it in but a single sentence. Döbringer comments:

He must now sense how the opponent feels in the fight. If he is strong and hard, the combatant should, while the opponent protects himself, become soft and light. In the case that the opponent is himself soft and light, vice versa.

Here the tactical advice is clear and unequivocal. If the opponent is strong in the bind, “become soft and light.” And the reverse is true; if the opponent is “soft and light,” become strong and hard. This simple principle echoes advice that Sun Tzu offers in the Art of War, suggesting that it is a fundamental principle of combat. It also underlies Fiore’s techniques of using his three turns—the tre volte—once the incrosa has been read using what I call sentimento
For Fiore, this means using a *volta stabile*, a stable turn, to rotate the sword slightly if the opposing pressure is light. Against moderate pressure and facing a closed line (no *bloss* or “opening”), he retrieves the sword, recoiling it briefly to the shoulder using a *mezza volta* and striking to the other side (usually behind) the opponent’s blade. Against strong pressure, he allows the energy in the opponent’s strike to turn his own sword aggressively, and again strikes to the other side, but this time with a great deal of time to spare, and thus a great deal of energy. This is shown in the fourth play of the *zogho largo*, what Fiore calls the *Colpo di Villano*, the “villein’s blow.” While the German repertoire in this case is considerably more complex and varied, there is also a sophisticated discussion of the timing (*tempo*) necessary. This, too, is an important element of the Art, because it underlines the importance of time as the opponent reacts.

To make sure that the opponent cannot himself strike, the combatant should instantly use the *nachschlag*, meaning that he attacks again while the opponent is still protecting himself from the *vorschlag*, using a strike or thrust. He may employ many techniques for driving towards the opponent’s openings, maintaining permanent motion, closing with him, isolating and confusing him so that he busies himself in defense and cannot make attacks of his own. If he must defend himself or focus on attacks made against him, he is in much greater danger than the one who strikes him, because he must either defend or be hit. And this makes it very difficult for him to gain an opportunity for his own attacks. So Liechtenauer says, “I tell you truthfully, no one defends without danger. If you understand this, he will not be able to attack.”

If the principles in these five words are not adhered to, this is the reason why a “hewer” often defeats a master. He wins [and maintains] the *vorschlag*.

(21r)

Now it has been before said that Liechtenauer says that the combatant must bravely drive in with a good *vorschlag*, striking first to the head or arms whether he hit or miss, so that he strikes, stuns and frightens him and so that he does not know what to do in response. Also he says that the combatant should strike to the *nachschlag* before the opponent

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71 Fiore declares but does not define the *tre volte* on Getty fol. 22r. I have shown elsewhere that these three turns of the sword are in fact then illuminated in the first several plays of the *zogho largo*, which follow on fols. 25r – 26r.

72 The literal phrase is *hawer*, by which I presume the author intends a man who “hews” in an uncontrolled and unschool fashion, not according to the Art.
recovers, else he come with his own attack. This also means that the combatant should strive to keep the opponent busy defending himself.

If the opponent defends against the vorschlag, the combatant must come immediately to the nachschlag while the opponent defends, driving in with the pommel or transitioning to the zwerchau, which are generally good [choices]. The combatant can usually transition into the zwerch, or he can use other techniques which start before the opponent can execute his own attack. You will hear how to generate one technique from the other, if you follow his [Liechtenauer’s] advice. This the combatant must execute with a single thought, preferably with a single strike for the vorschlag and with the nachschlag in quick succession.

If this first strike is not successful, the initiative won in striking first must be protected and extended using the nachschlag, as Döbringer writes, “meaning that he attacks again while the opponent is still protecting himself.” This is very close to what Fiore is describing in his Second Master of Battle, where an attack that does not succeed in its attack must be immediately (subito) followed-on in order to maintain the initiative. In the kunst des fechten, this maintenance either in the vorschlag or with continued strikes towards emerging openings in the nachschlag. In so doing, as Döbringer writes, this “isolates and confuses him so that he busies himself in defense and cannot make attacks of his own.” Interestingly, Fiore counsels the combatant to finish the fight no more than three layers deep, and does not seem to agree with the idea of “permanent motion;” rather, he drives forward to reach the fight’s resolution within three or a maximum of four steps, if the “true” arte d’armizare is to be revealed.

Döbringer writes that this sheer offensive power can overwhelm even the careful and studied defense of a master-at-arms. To reinforce this point, he offers a number of good choices that can be made in the nachschlag, all of which are presented in the technical section that follows.

It may happen that one may have to defend against the opponent’s vorschlag. If so, he would defend himself by getting to the opponent’s sword—if he is just a little slow or indecisive, he would want to stay on the sword [in the bind], using winden and feel [fühlen] to see if the opponent wants to pull back from the bind or not.
If the opponent has struck first, then the making of cover is of paramount importance (or else one is dead, injured or at least discomfited); this is what I believe Döbringer means when he says it is important to “get to the opponent’s sword.” The result of such a cover is a crossing of the swords, the aforementioned *binden* (in the *kunst des fechten*) or *incrosare* (in the *arte d’armizare*). From this contact, the Liechtenauer system instructs the swordsman to “read” the bind using feel, *fühlen*, to see how committed he is to the bind. Fiore has a much abbreviated approach, as discussed above. But whatever follow-on (*nachschlag*) attack is made, the point is oftentimes the fastest option:

If the opponent pulls back from the bind, and the points face one another at the openings, the skilled combatant will follow directly with the point, before the opponent can recover from the withdrawal, (21v) thereby executing a good thrust to the chest or anywhere he can strike him best. By this method the opponent cannot leave the bind unharmed, because with this follow-on he gets closer by thrusting forward with his sword’s point while at the sword [in the bind], following the principle of the nearest and closest target.

Often, the fastest available and most direct attack from the *binden* or *incrosa* is a thrust. I have found this to be true in Fiore’s system as well. From the *incrosa*, the fastest resolution is a thrust (*punta*), rather than a strike (*colpo*). As Döbringer says, this attack is devastating because it enshrines the principle of the closest and nearest target. Again, this re-emphasizes and supports the idea of the medieval martial arts being focused primarily on efficiency, function and power.

If the opponent tries to renew his attack using long strikes or thrusts after withdrawing from the bind, he may always gain the *nachschlag* with a thrust rather than with the first attack. In using the word, “nach,” Liechtenauer [explains], if one has struck in the *vorschlag* in order to move in without pause and striking in the *nachschlag* (in the same movement), the combatant should stay in constant motion and in constant contact, using one technique after another. So if the first attack fails, the second, third or fourth may hit, not allowing the opponent to attack since no one will have a significant advantage in fighting saving he who strives according to this teaching and these five words.

Now if it happens that the opponent does stay in the bind after he (displaced), and it has comes to pass that he stays on the sword, having done nothing with the *nachschlag* as yet, the combatant should wind and stay on the sword, noting and feeling whether the opponent is weak or strong at the sword.
The first paragraph above restates the principle, reiterating and emphasizing its importance. The terms “vor” and “nach,” as with their Döbringer versions, vorschlag and nachschlag, be adequately translated into English. But the loose principle of maintaining the initiative in the vor, but retrieving it in the nach if lost remains clear. Here, if the thrust or “finding of the point” doesn’t result in a successful attack, and if the opponent fails to act in the nachschlag and make a strike of his own, the bind must be quickly assessed. This “strong bind” case is discussed first:

If he feels that the opponent is strong, hard and rigid, only intending to press with the sword, the combatant should become soft and light, completely giving up his strength. Thus he will let the opponent’s sword go, that it might whip around, driven by the pressure. The combatant may now slide off, retrieving his sword quickly, (22r) and then strike for the opponent’s openings quickly and nimbly, to the head or body with strikes, thrusts and cuts, whichever is most sure and most direct.

For the harder the opponent presses with his sword, the further his sword is flung aside when the combatant suddenly becomes soft and lets the opponent’s sword slide off. The opponent will then be left open and can be touched or hit however the combatant wishes, before the opponent can recover and make his own attack.

Figure 3.2: Fiore's expression of the same "hard versus soft" principle. Fiore dei Liberi, Getty mss., fol. 26r.

This is a classic expression of the soft versus hard principle, and we find it in Fiore, as the Colpo di Villano, Getty fol. 26r, m 156-7 (shown above), lo villano che lo traga cum sua
spada... pigliando lo suo colpo a meza la tua spada e lassa discorrer la sua spada a terra e subito respondegli cum lo fendente per la testa..., “the buffoon who overbears with his sword... take his blow at the middle of the sword, letting it run along the sword to the ground; respond then with a *fendente* for the head...” Within Fiore’s *arte d’armizare*, this is known as a *tutta volta* of the sword, a “complete turn.” But he also uses, against strong pressure, a *mezza volta*, or “half turn,” described (but not named) in Getty 25r and 25v, m 151 and 153. Indeed, what Döbringer suggests when he says, “let the opponent’s sword go, that it might whip around, driven by the pressure. The combatant may now slide off, retrieving his sword quickly,” describes the *tutta* or *mezza volta*, depending upon the pressure applied.

[Contrarily], if the opponent is weak and soft [in the bind], and the combatant notices this, the combatant should [instead] be strong and hard at the sword and should drive in quickly and forcefully at the sword, directly from the front, to the next available opening. Just as a string would be attached to the point and pulled towards the nearest opening, so as to succeed with the thrust.

If the opponent is then strong and defends against the thrust and deflects it by becoming strong at the sword, so that he again presses the combatant’s sword, again the combatant should become soft and light and let the opponent’s sword slide off. By this evasion he may seek openings quickly with strikes, thrusts and cuts, as he wishes. This is what Liechtenauer means with the words, *weich und hart*, “soft and hard.”

Now Döbringer discusses the opposite, where the opponent is “weak in the bind.” Executing the principle, in this case the combatant comes with strength, “being strong and hard at the sword and should drive in quickly and forcefully.” In this case, direct action is available because the opponent’s sword has not achieved sufficient cover; it is no longer an obstacle to be got around. In this case, it is either irrelevant because it has not covered important openings, or it is not strongly enough supported, so it may be moved.

Fiore, too, has this principle and it connects in the very same play, Getty 25r m 149-50. Here, a *volta stabile*, or stable turn of the sword is made towards another opening *on the same*
side. Compare this with what Döbringer writes, “...should drive in...quickly to the next available opening...just as a string were attached to the point and would be pulled towards the nearest opening.” This is a quick attack with the point, and Fiore’s advice is the same. Together, they distill a key principle, **hard versus soft and soft versus hard**. In the next section, Döbringer reiterates the principle, citing Aristotle directly (but poorly):

This concept is from Aristotle’s concept of *auctoritas* (22v), as he writes in the book *De interpretatione*: “Oppositions shine more clearly if placed next to each other than when directly opposing them.”

Weak against strong, hard against soft, and vice versa. Were it only strong on strong, the stronger would always win. This is why Liechtenauer’s Art of fighting (*kunst des fechten*) is authentic and correct; a weak man can win with his Art and wits in the same way that a strong man could using his strength. Were it not so, there would be no Art.

Now Döbringer transcends the later commentators to explain why the strong versus weak / weak versus strong principle works, citing Aristotle, in the “shining of oppositions.” This seems to be a clear attempt to apply a natural principle in order to explain causality. Importantly, Döbringer suggests that without Art (artifice, skill), “the stronger would always win.” One who is not naturally strong and fast can be defeated by one who uses his wits and who uses his training and skill.

Because of this, fighting teaches us to feel (*fühlen*), and about this Liechtenauer says, “Learn *fühlen*; *indes* is a word that cuts,” because if you are at the sword (*binden*) with someone, and you are skilled in *fühlen*, regardless of whether your opponent is weak or strong at the sword, immediately (*indes*), while you are in the bind, you may well observe and plan what you should do against him. According to this teaching, and of the Art, the opponent may not withdraw from the bind without being hurt, because as Liechtneauer says, “Strike such that he is confused should he withdraw.”

Now, according to this teaching, understand well that you should try to gain the *vorschlag*. As soon as you execute it, immediately drive in without pause with the

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73 This is an articulation of Aristotle’s famous *Square of Opposition* statement, where he asserts that every affirmation and its negation are “opposed” such that always one of them must be true, and the other false. Interestingly, this may give support to the assertion that Fiore’s *contrario* may prove the attack against the *scolaro* as “false” in keeping with Aristotle’s ideas. More needs to be done to flesh out this connection, and the use of Latin terms sprinkled throughout this vernacular manuscript.
nachschlag, which could be the second, third or fourth strike or thrust, such that your opponent cannot himself make a strike. If you now bind with him [on the sword], and are skilled in fühlen, doing as has been written above, owing to the foundation of fighting that you are permanently in motion, neither pausing nor hesitating. So if it now comes to fühlen, do as was written before.

Döbringer now speaks of the important concepts of fühlen—feeling—and indes. Neither have truly correlative translations. Whenever the swords are crossed (binden), the combatant who more quickly ascertains, by fühlen, and acts immediately (indes), will likely secure the fight’s resolution in his favor. He will win. Fiore does not mention much about this in general, but he does iterate, in zogho after zogho, the critical importance of acting immediately, which he calls subito. I believe that a strong case can be made for correlating indes and subito, although the meanings are not precisely the same. In the arte d’armizare and the kunst des fechten, it is necessary to observe, orient, decide, and act immediately, subito or indes. In so doing, the combatant achieves success in the nachschlag, and maintains or retrieves the initiative. This is a clear expression of a timeless fighting principle.

Because most fights result in a crossing of the swords, binden or incrosare, both masters build their core system around such a circumstance. From the incrosa, Fiore counsels in his arte d’armizare that the combatant must immediately choose his response according to the positions (poste) of the swords, often building around one of the three volte or a quick thrust. In Döbringer, the choice is to drive through (like Fiore’s volta stabile) against a weak bind or to go around a strong one (akin to Fiore’s mezze- and tutte volte). In either case, the need for reacting first is acute, and this is expressed in both systems with an emphasis on acting with indes (immediacy), subito.

And so as you begin, always with measure and in control. When you have won the vorschlag, take care to avoid striking with too much speed or with too much commitment, or you will be unable to recover sufficiently to do the nachschlag. This is why Liechtenauer says, “Be ready for this; all things need measure of control.” Remember this
also when stepping or before all other techniques, as it is first amongst the principles of fighting.

Finally, Döbringer lists the “first” principle of the kunst des fechten “last.” “All things,” said Liechtenauer in his zettel, “need measure and control.” This idea of control and stability, of not over-reaching or over-extending one’s self, is expressed also in Fiore’s segno and is implicit in the kinesthetic strength of Fiore’s figures. Not only does the lynx govern the segno from a position symbolically above the rest, always measuring and employing judgment, but the whole system is built upon the concept of stabilitās, as the tower upon the elephant’s back.74

Conclusion

I have only analyzed the first half of Döbringer’s Liechtenauer commentary, because the second half consists of techniques specific to the system. But the principles of the Art demonstrate strong parallels to the nearly contemporary treatise by the Italian master Fiore dei Liberi, and, like the earlier RA MS I.33 sword and buckler treatise, it builds on a tradition of mnemonic verse intended to preserve aspects of the martial art and ensure its communication to future generations. These three systems demonstrate powerful adherence to principles of efficiency and power that have been optimized through the experience of many combatants over an extended period of time. It is possible, but not necessary, that the Italian and German systems had a common ancestor, or that one was based upon the other, because similar principles of efficiency could well have been developed independently. But what is more likely is that all three treatises represent a stream of martial arts tradition that connected European combatants as they mixed in martial, social and cultural exchanges over at least three centuries. Many concepts articulated by Döbringer may also be found in the nearly contemporary Italian treatise, the Fior

74 See the next chapter for a fuller discussion on the segno and the martial virtues proposed by Fiore.
di Battaglia by Fiore dei Liberi. The close correspondence of observations and the Aristotelian framework that bounds both works suggests the existence of a European martial arts tradition that was considerably wider than the number of surviving manuscripts may suggests. The important survival of Latin terminology that remains as a kind of after-image in Döbringer’s work suggests that many of the terms employed by Liechtenauer in the creation of his merkeverse were not made up by him. Indeed, Döbringer states that Liechtenauer did not invented the kunst des fechten, but rather than it had existed for “hundreds of years” previously.

Further, we can distill principles of personal combat that probably encompassed the understanding about combat in general held by knights and men-at-arms throughout the period. These principles, while expressed in terms of personal or micro combat, would also have been applied to the combatants and leadership’s understanding of how to conduct battles, and could explain why there are no new treatises on the theory of war which are not based on Vegetius’ de re Militari until the coming of Nicolo Machiavelli. Perhaps medieval men understood combat from the perspective of personal combat, and they then applied these same concepts in battle, albeit in a larger scale. Perhaps the principles form a kind of Clausewitz for the Middle Ages and early Renaissance. In this sense, and without a central state, warfare in the Middle Ages may be thought of as a single combat writ large. Hanko Döbringer’s little book of advice might thus reveal a great deal more than simply how to use a sword; and the treatise could eventually help to “fill the gap” in works on the Art of War between Vegetius and Machiavelli.
CHAPTER 4

THE ARTE D’ARMIZARE OF FIORE DEI LIBERI

Anchora digo che nessuno di miei scolari, in special li sopradetti, non avé may libri in l’arte de combattere altro che missier Galeazo da Mantoa, bench’ello diceva che senza libri non sarà camay nissuno bon magistro né scolaroin quest’arte. Et io Fiore lo confermo vero: ché quest’arte è sì longa che lo non è al mondo do homo de si granda memoria che podesse tenere a mentre senza libri la quarta parte di quest’arte. Adoncha cum la quarta parte di quest’arte non sapiendo più non seria magistro...

Also I say that none of my scholars, including those above-mentioned, ever had a book on the art of combat other than Galeazzo da Mantua, who used to say, ‘One cannot be master or scholar of the Art without books.’ And I, Fiore, confirm this as the truth: so vast is this Art that not even a man with the best memory in the world can hold more than a quarter of the Art without the aid of books. It follows then that none who hold just a quarter of the art can become a master...

—Fiore dei Liberi

Overview

We have already seen, in the last chapter, comparisons between the Liechtenauer material and the work of the Italian, Fiore dei Liberi. Fiore’s work is known to survive in four works, wherein he describes his arte d’armizare, literally “the art of the use of arms.” Dating from a range between 1409 and 1420, these treatises offer further powerful evidence for the existence of

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1 Elements of this chapter have been drawn from chapter 2 of my previous book, The Sword in Two Hands: A Full-Color Training Guide for the Medieval Longsword based on Fiore dei Liberi’s Fiore di Battaglia, Highland Village, TX: Chivalry Bookshelf, 2007. That work represents a synthesis of my archaeological (analysis of physical culture and experimental archaeology), historical and kinesthetic research but is written as an introductory textbook, rather than presenting an historical argument. In this chapter my intention is to focus on historiographical methodologies rooted in textual and visual analysis, corroborated through comparisons with other sources and also from my practical and archeological work.

2 Fiore dei Liberi, Fior di Battaglia, Getty MS Ludwig XV 13, fol. 2r. Transcription for this passage and all of the Getty citations courtesy Massimo Malipiero.

3 Two of Fiore’s works survive today and are in the United States. One is in the John Pierpont Morgan Library in New York, M.0383 (hereafter, “Morgan”), while the other is in the J.P. Getty Collection, where it is known as Ludwig XV 13 (hereafter, “Getty”). A third is said to survive in the family library of the Pisani-Dossi family, and is widely known owing to the 1902 facsimile edition by Francesco Novati (hereafter, “PD” or “Pisani-Dossi”). A fourth has been recently discovered in the Bibliotheque Nationale de France, MS Latin 11269 (hereafter, “Florius”).
a European martial arts tradition. Fiore’s system is strongly integrated and is based upon core principles which he applies to a variety of weapons, including the dagger, baton, sword, spear and poleaxe, in and out of armour, on foot and on horseback. Most of the principles we will have seen within the I.33 and Liechtenauer manuscripts. These are the core around which regional styles and forms seem to have been built, and they arise from the efficient application of kinesthetic mechanics that maximizes the effectiveness of the military technology of the day, but filtered through cultural lenses. The result are systems based around the same principles, but with differences in the application of each art based on differences in the core assumptions about how initiative is seized and/or retained.

But as we have seen, the treatises themselves are difficult to interpret. Generations of scholars examining them have concluded that they are either flawed, incomplete, or that they are unsystematic, as was discussed in chapter 1. Great effort must be made in order to distill the underlying principles, often expressed only as subtext.\(^4\) I believe that an adequate understanding of the rich contents of the treatises can only really be achieved through a blended methodology that combines knowledge with the “sword in hand” with a close study of the text itself and its historical, literary and physical context.

Fiore claims to have taught this art to several well-known condottieri, who purportedly used his teachings in a series of deeds of arms and whose accounts survive in the historical record.\(^5\) Like the kunst des fechten described by Hanko Döbringer, this is an art of the battlefield where power, efficiency and precision are cardinal virtues. More than the German tradition, Fiore’s art emphasizes precision blended with power and efficiency, capturing the initiative and

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\(^4\) Even a scholar with the breadth of knowledge, skill and influence of Francesco Novati, concludes, “not only is the book imperfect, but it is also poorly organized.” Francesco Novati, *Flos duellatorum in armis, sine armis, equester, pedester: il Fior di battaglia: testo inedito del 1410*. Bergamo: Instituto Italiano d'Arte Grafiche, 1902, 84.

striving to seize control over the opponent as soon as possible in the fight. But it also relies upon the same foundational principles that govern the Liechtenauer school, principles that defined the Art of Arms during the course of the later Middle Ages and into the Renaissance.

Historiography

The earliest studies that touched on Fiore’s work began as early as the eighteenth century with Guisto Fontanini’s *Dell’Eloquenza Italiana*, where in book III he briefly mentions Fiore’s writings. In the flurry of antiquarian interest at the end of the nineteenth century, Fiore’s work was only briefly discussed and dismissed as unscientific by Mérignac, Castle, Masiello, Gello, and Hergsell. 

The first work of any substance on Fiore must be considered the work of the great and eloquent Francesco Novati, completed in 1902. Novati’s long career, which included a wealth of books published from 1891-1905, was founded upon a powerful, widely ranging historiographical methodology, but which was also rooted in the currents of nationalism which characterized the era. Consequently, his analysis of Fiore’s work, based on the Pisani-Dossi manuscript alone, was at once profoundly influential and incomplete. In terms of influence, the publication of the 1902 facsimile of Fiore’s work the *Flos Duellatorum* ensured that generations of students would have access to at least one of Fiore’s four known surviving works. However, Novati was unable to see two further manuscripts which were held for many years in Venetian archives, and seems to have been completely unaware of the fourth. His work is also incomplete

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in terms of its conceptual basis, for, while generally deferent to the power and importance of Fiore’s *Flos Duellatorum*, he concluded that Fiore’s work was *oltrecchè imperfetto, il libro del Friuliano è poi ache assai disordinato*, “not only is the book imperfect, but also poorly organized.” His analysis, like nearly all of the scholarship which has followed—both amateur and professional—attempted to fit Fiore’s work into the “evolution” of the “science” of fencing, emphasizing in particular the influential “Bolognese” school that included such potent luminaries as Pietro Monte, Antonio Manciolino, Achille Marozzo, Angelo Viggiani, and Salvatore Fabris. This emphasis on progressive development and national competition with German, French and Spanish systems seems to have held him back from using a horizontal comparative methodology, which would have necessitated more thorough comparisons with contemporary surviving manuscripts in German in the context of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Instead, he argued for the superiority of Italian fencing over the German, Spanish or French. As a result, he reached the unfortunate conclusion cited above.

However, this influence of nationalism was somewhat tempered by his strict professionalism. Novati was thorough in his inclusion of known corroborating sources, and his analysis was strong, providing the foundation for the research which has followed. It is difficult to fault him for missing the system inherent in Fiore’s approach, and he acknowledges this point.

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8 F. Novati, op. cit., 69.
10 Antonio Manciolino, *Opera Nova per Imparare a Combattere*, Venezia, 1531.
13 Salvatore Fabris, *De lo schermo overo scienza d’arme di Salvator Fabris capo dell’Ordine dei Sette Cori*, Copenhagen, 1606.
with an insightful and exceedingly elegant methodological comment near the end of his introduction:

In order that the history of armed combat in the Middle Ages rest on a solid knowledge base, an exploration of the ancient monuments [treatises] will be necessary, which many researchers have started, but without an accurate method, It will be a long time before these studies reach the necessary levels of efficiency. But this research will bring no gain if those who study the theory and practice of the art of fencing fail to join their efforts with those of historians and archaeologists. If there is one matter on which they have to agree, it’s this: practitioners, historians and archaeologists will make mistakes if they ignore each other, while they may easily avoid them working together.14

After 1902, little of substance was written on Fiore until the turn of the century. As noted in chapter 1, fencing historians in the twentieth century wrote using the framework of evolutionary progressivism. Through this lens, Fiore’s material indeed appeared to lack the elegance and efficiency attributed to the “evolved” martial sport of fencing, which eventually developed into three main schools, the French, Italian and Spanish, later augmented by Hungarian and Polish approaches to the sabre. Indeed, the evolutionary progressivist method emphasized development through what might be best thought of as evolutionary lines, which led generations of researchers—including Novati—to conduct comparative research along national or stylistic lines, de-emphasizing lateral and temporal comparisons better rooted in historical and cultural context.15

More recently, Sydney Anglo’s *The Martial Arts of Renaissance Europe* grappled with Fiore’s treatises and attempted to integrate elements of temporal comparative analysis with the

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14 F. Novati, op. cit., 84, “Perché la storia dell’arte d’armeggiare nel corso dell’età media possa finalmente assidersi sovra basi, converrà che l’opera d’esumazione degli antichi monumenti che la concernono, intrapresa sinora con lodevole zelo da perecchi, ma senza criteri ben netti e precisi, abbia raggiunto quello sviluppo dal quale si trova pur sempre assai lontana. Né codesto lavoro riuscirà veramente serio e proficuo, ove agli sforzi di quanti coltivano vuoi teoricamente, vuoi praticamente gli studi schermistici, non associino i propri quanti consacran l’attività loro all’incremento delle scienze archeologiche e delle discipline storiche. Se v’ha caso in cui la concordia sia necessaria, egli è questo per l’appunto. Disgiunti, I cultori della scherma e quelli antichità medievali continueranno ad ignorarsi a vicenda, e cadranno in errori, in ommissioni, in equivoci, che, stretti ad un sol patto, sapranno invece agevolmente evitare.”  
15 Novati’s analysis was expanded by Luigi Zanutto in *Fiore di Premariacco ed i ludi e le feste marziali e civili in Friuli nel Medioevo*, 1907, but even in this work very little corroboration was established.
evolutionary progressivist approach that remains clear within the work. A magnificent book documenting the history of the European fencing arts, it was written before the decade of intensive energy by practitioners that has resulted in a much deeper understanding of medieval and early Renaissance German, Italian, Iberian, Burgundian and English sources.

With regard to Fiore, Professor Anglo’s analysis is brief, with less than two pages covering the sword work in a work of over three hundred and fifty pages. Anglo concluded that, “Masters are distinguished from their pupils by the simple expedient of wearing a crown, although the scheme is not carried out as consistently as in MS I.33, where the monk’s tonsure is never omitted.”16 True, but as we see in the section below describing the Fiore’s system, the crown better parallels the cross in I.33, which begins a new sequence. This is explained in the Prologue, but the coding might not be apparent to one who does not work with the manuscripts regularly. Later, he concludes that the Flos Duellatorum is inherently limited, especially in comparison with later treatises.17 These conclusions exemplify the evolutionary progressivist approach.18

Anglo does add considerably more detail in his chapters that consider pole-weapons, appropriately comparing Fiore’s technique with that of the fifteenth century Burgundian treatise, the Jeu de la Hache.19 However, he then concludes that Fiore’s omission of other types of pole-weapons, other than spears and poleaxes, makes the treatise less complete than those of later

16 Anglo, op. cit., p. 45.
17 Ibid., p. 46.
18 I do not believe that Anglo intentionally or even consciously adopted this approach, but I do find that his conclusions on much of the medieval material align with the more abrupt declarations of this approach as expressed by the vast majority of fencing historians. Professor Anglo’s work is as yet unmatched for its thoroughness and insightful analysis, but I believe that the temporal comparative methodology relies on assumptions that measure medieval manuscripts by anachronistic standards. My strong feeling is that had Anglo enjoyed access to the research of the last decade, he would probably conclude differently.
masters.\textsuperscript{20} I believe, however, that Fiore’s omission was not an error, because the integrated, principle-based nature of the \textit{arte} did not require exposition of each and every weapon—rather, the entire system is bound together as a whole and a knowledgeable combatant will be able to readily apply the principles to any sort of similar weapon. His analysis on grappling techniques is also more extensive, covering four pages, but here he compares Fiore to the later Italian masters, rather than looking for parallels in contemporary German treatises, again characteristic of the evolutionary progressive approach. This being said, Professor Anglo attempted to use both vectors of analysis—both the phyla of the evolutionary progressive and the horizontal comparative approach of the cultural historian—and the results are invaluable for the period from 1480 or so to the end of the transitional period leading to the establishment of classical fencing doctrine in the eighteenth century.

Even the categorization by historians of Fiore’s and Liechtenauer’s (as well as Ott the Jew’s wrestling corpus) work as “fencing” manuals was based on the assumptions of the evolutionary progressivist school. It was not until very late in the twentieth century, in the 1990s, when amateur researchers began to consider Fiore’s work as a self-contained system. While not professional academics, researchers such as Bob Charron, Rob Lovett,\textsuperscript{21} Matt Easton,\textsuperscript{22} Colin Richards,\textsuperscript{23} Guy Windsor,\textsuperscript{24} Fabrice Cognot,\textsuperscript{25} Giovanni Rapsardi,\textsuperscript{26} Tommaso Leoni,\textsuperscript{27} Dr.

\textsuperscript{20}Ibid., 159.
\textsuperscript{24}Guy Windsor, \textit{The Swordsman's Companion}, Union City, Calif: Chivalry Bookshelf, 2004.
\textsuperscript{26}Fiore dei Liberi and Giovanni Rapisardi, \textit{Flos duellatorum in armis, sine armis equester et pedester}, Torino: Seneca Edizione, 2002.
Robert Holland, Marco Rubboli, Renzo Nostini, myself, and Colin Hatcher, amongst others, began to transcribe, translate and interpret Fiore’s system. Many of these researchers began to think of the arte d’armizare as a martial art, rather than a fencing system, but no definitions were hazarded. They produced a host of kinesiological and experimental archeological efforts but these lack the historical context cited by Novati and his “rigorous method.” I was amongst these researchers, founding the Schola Saint George as a non-profit school precisely in Novati’s spirit of blended methodology in order to better understand Fiore’s arte d’armizare, approaching the historical problem using textual analysis (transcription, translation, interpretation and comparison), experimental archeology, and kinesiology in order to approach its reconstruction and application as a martial art.

In Italy, the academic and kinesthetic work of Massimo Malipiero did result in the best work produced since Novati’s 1902 Flos Duellatorum. Malipiero’s Il Fior di Battaglia di Fiore dei Liberi da Cividale: il Codice Ludwiv XV 13 del J. Paul Getty Museum, published in 2006 cooperation with the Trustees of the Getty Museum in Los Angeles, presented a facsimile translation of the Fior di Battaglia alongside new transcriptions and rich interpretative material. While a precious and irreplaceable reference work, Malipero’s interpretative analysis of the physical technique remains rooted in the evolutionary progressivist approach, and as such missed the opportunity (and imperative, I believe) to perform the horizontal comparison necessary to understand Fiore’s system in its historical context. Instead, he stresses continuity

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with the influential Bolognese school, essentially following but deepening Novati. This approach is certainly valid, it only captures half of the equation and it makes it very difficult to understand Fiore’s work in its own context.

*Il Magistro* Fiore dei Liberi

Fiore dei Liberi was active in the second half of the fourteenth century and into the early fifteenth. We know him primarily from the content of his own works, expressed in three Prologues, at least two of which are associated with Marquis Niccolò III, Lord of Ferrara and Modena. There are a scant handful of historical records that mention Fiore, and there is some documentation about the *condottieri* he names in the Prologue.

Little has been added to the historical research on Fiore’s life skillfully woven by Francesco Novati. Drawing on his wide knowledge of archival material in Northern Italy, we find scant references to Fiore apart from the period 1383-4, apart from what he writes about himself in the Prologues that appear at the beginning of the Pisani-Dossi, Getty and Morgan manuscripts. But we must look at the information provided with caution, as one of the purposes of a Prologue is to establish legitimacy both for the author himself and for the work in general. To be certain of what is written we must corroborate as much as possible from other historical records, but sadly scholars have been unable, thus far, to document most of what Fiore writes, although efforts are ongoing.

According to his account, Fiore was born in Friuli, probably in Premariacco, a small

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32 The substantial portion of this section is drawn for the most part from my analysis in the *Sword in Two Hands*, op. cit., 19-20.
village not far from Cividale, the son of the “noble” messire Benedetto. He claims attachment to the dei Liberi family of Premariacco, and notes that the region lies within the diocese of the Patriarch of Aquelia:

Fior furlan de Civida dostria che fo di missier Benedetto de la nobel casada deli liberi da Premeryas dela diocese dello Patroarchado de Aquileglia…

Fiore Furlan of Cividale, of Austria, that is of messer Benedetto of the noble house of dei Liberi from Premaraccio, of the diocese of the Patriarch of Aquelia…

We do not know when Fiore was born. Novati believes him to have been born between 1340 and 1350, but there is no documentary evidence to suggest the earlier of these dates, as the first mentions of him are not until 1383, when we find him listed in the city accounts of Udine as a magistro. We know that he probably lived at least until 1410—since that is the date given in the Novati as to when it was begun—but I believe that, since the Getty version is almost certainly later, he probably lived into the 1420s (see the later section on dating the manuscripts). If he was old at this time, we can perhaps think of him as born between 1350 and1360. We know nothing else about Fiore’s young life, except that he wrote that he had a natural desire, from a young age, to learn the art of arms in and out of armour, with all manner of weapons, as he writes in each of his three prologues:

Different scholars working on Fiore’s background attribute his origin to Cividale or Premariacco, both of which are in the region of Friuli. Premariacco is not mentioned in the Pisani-Dossi version, but it is included in both the Morgan and Getty.

The question of Fiore’s claimed nobility is not clear. Most practitioners have translated messire to mean “Sir,” although I have seen no civic records that correlate the knightly rank of a Benedetto dei Liberi. Certainly the Italian scholar Zanutto, cited previously, tried to make a case for his nobility in his 1907 work. But I do not find the evidence at all clear on this point; we do not find any records that Fiore himself was knighted during his lifetime, nor does he claim the title knight anywhere in his known writing. Additionally, we find in his prologue several of the condottieri captains he mentions as cavaliero, titles which seem to accurately reflect corroborating records relating to these men. I suspect that Fiore claims the noble family on very loose terms as a method of establishing legitimacy, although there is a chance that we may discover something more concrete, or it could have been a family myth, or it could be true. Whatever the case, the point is not important for our purposes but the debate will doubtless continue.

 Getty MS fol.1.

Francesco Novati, op. cit., 23.
...uolse imprender ad amicare et arte de combater in Sbarra, de lança, açça, spada, e daga et de Abraçare a pe e acuallo in arme e senca arme.37

[I] wanted to learn about fighting and the art of combat within the lists, with the spear, poleaxe, sword, and dagger, and of grappling on foot and on horseback, in and out of armour.

In sua zouentu uolse imprendere ad armizare e arte de combater in sbara zoe a oltranza. De lanza, azza, spada e daga e de abrazar ape e a cauallo in arme e senza arme...e fateza de zascuna arma a cosi a defendere como a offendere e maximamente cose da combatere a oltranza. Anchora alter cose meraueglose e occulte che a poche homeni del mondo sono palese.38

Who in his youth wanted to learn the art of armoured fighting and the art of combat a oltranza within the barriers [or ‘lists’]. Of the spear, [pole]axe, sword, dagger and grappling on foot and on horseback, in and out of armour...and the qualities of each weapon in the defense and in offending, and most of all, for fighting a oltranza. Also other marvelous and secret things known to few other men in this world.

Curiously, he also says that he had a desire to learn the “temper of steel,” which, given the lyrical nature of Italian in general and the Friulian dialect in particular, could either mean that a literal interest in iron and steel or a metaphorical interest in things pertaining to steel, or, put another way, the Arts of War, anchora uolse saure tempere di ferri, “...also wanting to know the temper of steel.” 39

This idea is reinforced by the specific mention of fighting a oltranza, and for fighting conducted sbarra, literally “within the barriers”—the notation that describes feats of arms conducted in a duel or other feat of arms where few rules apply. This does not mean that Fiore’s art was restricted to encounters where a mortal outcome was expected, but it does seem to suggest that potentially fatal combats were what he was most interested in. His techniques and his emphasis on controlling his opponent’s options strongly reinforces this suggestion, as we shall see later in the chapter. Wanting to know more about these arts, Fiore claims to have

37 Getty, op. cit., fol. 1.
38 Morgan, op. cit., fol. 1.
39 Getty, op. cit., fol. 1; the same phrase is mentioned in the Morgan, fol. 1v.
traveled and studied—at great expense—with diverse German and Italian experts in arms, masters, scholars and noblemen:

Et lo ditto Fiore sia imprese le ditte chose da molti magistri todeschi, e di molti italiani in piu prouincie et in molte citade cum grandissima e cum grandespese. E per la gracia di dio da tanti magistri e scolari. E in corte di grandi Signori principi duchi, marchesi, e conti chauallieri e schedieri in tanto a imprese questa arte.40

And the above-said Fiore learned from many German masters, and from many Italians in many provinces, in many citadels with great effort and at great expense. And by the grace of God from many masters and scholars. And [he] learned this art in many courts of great Lords, princes, dukes, marquises, counts, knights and squires.

It is interesting that Fiore is careful, in all three works, to note first that he studied with German masters, a hint perhaps at the probable highly regarded reputation held of the German fechtmeister, especially in northern Italy, where commerce between Austria and the Italian states was strong. Many condottieri were tedeschi—German. Recall also that Fiore refers to himself as an Austrian in his first paragraph, dostria (“of Austria”). Taken together, it is a powerful suggestion that the German martial arts were, prior to Fiore, ascendant, as Fiore is careful to invoke them, probably to add weight to his legitimacy. In the Latin section of the Pisani-Dossi, Fiore even names a specific German master, Suveno, with whom he claims to have studied.

Whether or not Fiore actually traveled or studied in Metz or anywhere else is presently unknown. But we do know from other sources that Fiore took part in at least a few actions during the course of his lifetime. Novati provides some good research drawn from city records to conclude that Fiore was present at Udine in 1383 and 1384:

1383: Die 30 Septembris in consilio Terri Utini deliberatum fuit supra balistris grossis et sagitamentis magister Flor, qui fuit de Civitate Austria (sic), qui examinet et ponat ad ordinem omnia existential in camera comunis et eciam que habent Fraternitates.41

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40 Getty, op. cit., fol. 1r; the Morgan treatise differs very little and may be considered essentially the same.  
1383: Die lune terito Augusti. Utini in consilio. Magister Flor de Civitate dimicator iecetups fuit in vinicum Terre, cum capitulis alias obervvatis et D. Federigus de Savorgnano fuit fideiussor.42

Anno 1384, ind. VII. Infrascripti sunt qui iuraverunt astare dominion Capitaneo pro bono et tranquillo statu Terre quod contra quoscunque delinquentes et excessores fiat iusticia criminalis secundum laudabiles consuetudines Terre Utini et deliberations consiliarias maioris Consilii et Consilii Secreti: omissis: In Burgo Glemone: Magister Florius scarmitor.43

In the conflict we was known to be associated with the side of Udine, He is included in the city records as taking care of the crossbows, and possibly artillery and firearms.44 We know from other sources that Fiore was in Padua in 1395, and again in 1399.45 It has been assumed by many writers that Fiore eventually met and entered the service of Niccolò II and / or III, based on the dedications of both the Pisani-Dossi and the Getty manuscripts. Indeed, both are at least associated with Niccolò III d’Este, Marquis of Ferrara and Modena, Lord of Reggio and of Parma:

Anchora lo libro istoriado de figure dipento e fato appeticioene de lo Illustrio et Excelso Meser Nicholo Signor Marchese dela cita de Ferara de la cita de modena e de parma e de reço citade.46

Also the historical book of figures drawn and made at the petition of the illustrious and excellent Sir Niccolò, Lord Marquis of the city of Ferrara, of the city of Modena, and of Parma and the citadel at Reggio.

Considerando io predetto Fiore che in questarte pochi almondo sen trouano magistri e uoglando che di mi sia fatta memoria in ella io faro un libro in tutta larte e de tutte chose le quale iso e di ferri e di tempere edaltre chose secondo lordene lo quale ma dado quallalto Signore che sopra gialtri per marcial uirtude mi piase piu epiu merita di questo

44 Francesco Novati claims that Fiore came back to Friulia midway through the year in 1383, but unfortunately he offers no further evidence beyond the city annals cited. I do not believe it has been established where Fiore was between 1384, when the last annal record was made, and the next mention of him, made in Padua in1395. Luigi Zanutto (p. 197) claims that Fiore became a wandering magistro after this time, but there is precious little fact upon which to make a conclusion. As Matt Easton asserts, this agrees with Fiore’s claim made in his own prologue that he traveled to study with masters and scholars, as well as noblemen, but this cannot, regrettably, be considered evidence.
45 Luigi Zanutto, op. cit., 212.
46 Pisani-Dossi, op. cit., carta 2a.
Considering that I, the aforementioned Fiore, find few masters in this art and wanting to make my memorial, I make this book which will contain the whole art and all that I know of iron—it’s temper and other things that follow—in the order in which my high Lord, who is above others in martial virtue and who is more deserving of my book for his nobility than are other Lords who I may encounter, that is my illustrious and excellent Lord, the powerful prince Sir NICOLÒ, Marquis d’Este, Lord of the noble city of Ferrara, of Modena, Reggio and Parma, etc., who God gave good life and future prosperity with victory over his enemies. AMEN.

Unfortunately, there are as yet no corroborating documents placing Fiore at any of Niccolò’s courts. We have fairly good records for many others who were present there, but there is nothing about Fiore. There is a hint, buried at the end of the PD prologue, that perhaps Fiore was by this time old, between fifty and seventy years old, depending upon the accepted date for his birth. We know that he probably lived at least until 1410, when the Pisani-Dossi manuscript was written and since, in 1409, Niccolò III became master of both Parma and Reggio, both mentioned in the Getty and PD manuscripts. He claims at the end of his prologues that he had, at this point, studied for more than forty years, which strongly suggests a birthdate of 1360 or 70, but it is very hard to tell.

So we know little if anything about Fiore’s later life, except that several of his books made their way into the d’Este library. My own belief is that Fiore led a humble life, punctuated with some success and at least limited access to the court of d’Este. It is likely, perhaps, that like the other scrimatore mentioned in various accounts, he taught his art in the inn-yards.⁴⁸ His attempt to secure a more stable and comfortable retirement within the d’Este court, around the

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⁴⁷ Getty, op. cit., fol. 3v.
⁴⁸ Francesco Novati discusses the location of Italian fencings schools near to the taverns (see note 39), and Sydney Anglo makes the same assertion for the English masters at arms in his *The Martial Arts of Renaissance Europe*, p. 7-8.
Castello di San Michele, may or may not have been successful. But we are fortunate that at least four of his books have survived, and it is with these four books that we’ll begin.

In the prologue of the Getty, Fiore states that he has studied the *arte d’armizare* for forty years, so these books represent a lifetime’s worth of work, but that he still had more to learn, as he was as yet “an imperfect master:”

*Che io Fiore sapiando legere e scriuer e disignare e abiando libri in questa arte e in lei o studiado ben XL anni e piu. Anchora non son ben perfecto magistro in questa arte* [Morgan F. 2v].

That I, Fiore, knowing how to read, write and draw, and having books on this art, have studied in them for more than forty years. But I am [still] not a perfect master in this art.

We know by this declaration that Fiore claims to have been at least forty years old at the time when the Morgan and the Getty were written. He writes in the final paragraph of the PD that he recommends himself to the Marquis because it took six months to compose and because he was then old, and did not want to undertake another similar effort. Did the rich Marquis perhaps convince Fiore to produce more works, perhaps improvements on the relatively rough Pisani-Dossi? What was the context in which the treatises were created?

**Context**

It has often been commented upon that warfare on the Italian peninsula took on a rather different character from the rest of Europe: its internecine character caused by political, religious and economic fragmentation coupled with local jealousies, vendetta, and outright crime. This meant that conflict escalated to combat was a common aspect of Italian culture, even as Italy

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49 The Getty text is essentially the same.
50 There is a note at the end of the martial poem in the PD, that claims Fiore studied for fifty years, rather than forty, *Che cinquanta anni in tal arte ostudiado, Chi inmen tempo piu so elne bon mercado* [PD Carta 2B]. I believe this is perhaps a boast, since he claims earlier in the prologue to have studied for more than forty years, not fifty. It is also possible that the verse was added sometime later.
metamorphosed culturally in the arts, letters, and sciences. Not surprisingly, this patchwork character blurred the lines of social distinction which had a firmer grip north of the Alps, resulting in lines of conflict between men of many different backgrounds coming into close and relatively frequent contact. The rich mixture of noblemen (*signori*), mercenaries (*condottieri*), and men-at-arms (*uomini d’arme*) brought knights from North of the Alps to fight in companies of mixed men, many hired for specific campaign objectives.

There were a wide number of forms that combat could take. On one end of the spectrum, personal defense in town and during travel would suggest some skill-in-arms for any male traveler or town-dweller. Judicial duels were fought to a limited degree in Italy, while duels of honor and rights seem to have been more common in Italy than elsewhere. War was endemic to the region as city-states vied with one another for influence, and the period of the Great Schism added a religious aspect to the Byzantine system of alliances, familial conflict, struggles between the *commune* and the *rurale*, and the clash of interests that fed local war on a large scale.

But war in Italy during the fourteenth century was not generally fought with the large Royal hosts employed during the Hundred Years’ War. Instead, the great families, cities and religious lords employed companies of men, often including or based wholly upon mercenaries. These men, known as *condottieri* (“contractors”), were to become a major power in their own right, as did Sir John Hawkwood of the White Company. These were skilled but often capricious men-at-arms, professional soldiers who served according to a written contract that governed in detail the soldier’s relationship to his captain, his company, and the company’s relationship to the employer. Such men were drawn from all parts of society, from the Italian peninsula and north of the Alps, particularly as groups of men gravitated south in the pauses and wake of the

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51 Matthew Mallet, *Mercenaries and Their Masters: Warfare in Renaissance Italy*, Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1974. More recent studies have attempted to place individual condottieri into context, but Mallet’s work remains the best overall analysis.
Hundred Years’ War between England and France. They were drawn from all parts of society, a genuine alloy of martial culture where ideals and chivalric culture could blend with the rougher and stoically practical world of the common soldier.

We might expect that the men of Italian cities and in the countryside would grow war-weary, but the cities were fiercely proud of their martial traditions and local histories. Civic festivals that featured various forms of combat, from the theatrical to the brutal, were common. Landowning noblemen continued their interaction with the “international” chivalric community, traveling to far lands to participate in wars and other deeds of arms, and hosting grand feats of arms in their 141alazzo. As the wealthy of both town and country created lavish courts, collecting poets, musicians, horse- and dance-masters, an opportunity was created also for sword-masters. Fiore dei Liberi capitalized on at least one such opportunity has he secured the notice of one of the most powerful men of his day, Niccolò III d’Este, Lord of Ferrara.

In Italy were found the full spectrum of martial encounters, from those we read as à plaisance,52 (including highly staged Round Tables, carousels, jousts and civic festivals) to those we think of as much more dangerous, those termed a oltranza, literally, “without limits,” which included duels, street fights, brawls, and war). The traditional domination of war management and participation in tournaments (hastiludium, ensiludium)53 by the gentry of northern Europe

52 Within the historical literature, martial engagements seem to have been roughly distinguished by their intention: those which were à plaisance tend to be more celebratory in nature, contrasted with those which were denoted à outrance (IT: a oltranza), where the outcome of the fight was of much more importance. These are medieval French terms (which we retain because the literature of the tournament is dominated by the plentiful French accounts), and Fiore himself mentions his interest in chose de combater ad oltrança in the first paragraph of his Prologue. By this interest it might be suggested that he is not particularly interested in jousts, pas d’armes, or civic contests, but rather in the duel, in personal defense and in war. This is not to say that his arte d’armizare is less valid in circumstances where less force is expected, and where more rules govern the encounter, but Fiore’s interest seems to have focused on fights à outrance, and this is borne out by the potential lethality of his techniques.

was far less pronounced in Italy, possibly because the commercial classes held far more influence and even participated in the management of war through communal government. As such, the precise role of arms and their use in Northern Italy is difficult to understand with clarity because all kinds of encounters took place, from friendly celebrations and chivalry competitions to riots, duels, raids, and formal battle.

In the surviving accounts we find that festivals, jousts and martial demonstrations or games were an integral part of civil life during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Noble weddings and gatherings were punctuated with such displays, as are recorded in Italian chronicles such as the *Chronicon Estense*. For example, in 1377 we find the usual inclusion of a tournament followed by feasting and jousting at the wedding of Francesco Novella da Carrara and Taddea d’Este.

The Visconti and Gonzaga were particularly fond of such celebrations, and there are well-recorded instances in Padua, Verona, and Venice. Indeed, one of the feats of arms Fiore cites is to have taken place within the Visconti castle at Pavia. As these contests were sponsored by princely families, they took on the character of those practiced in France, Burgundy and in the Savoy, where the princes vied with one another for more ornate, elaborate and thus expensive displays. Noblemen and members of the gentry were the participants in these encounters, which included men from England, Spain, France, and the Holy Roman Empire.

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*Accedit Appendix ... Unà Cùm Brevi Etymologico Linguae Gallicae Ex Utroque Glossario.* Rigaud: [s.n.], 1688. cited also in Novati, 92, note 55.


55 Barber & Barker, op. cit., p. 83.
Although these emprises were lavish and expensive, it does not necessarily follow that they were safe. Injuries, both intended and otherwise, accompany most feats of arms, especially those conducted à outrance. Frequently individual encounters à outrance were loosely regulated duels, sometimes quasi-national in character, that resembled the chivalric and classical traditions of single combats between champions. Although regulated, such duels were in many ways more dangerous than open warfare, since a nobleman on a European battlefield often enjoyed the benefit armour and the benefit of ransom: he was essentially worth more alive than dead. No such mechanism functioned in the duel, public or private. Many of the encounters Fiore notes in his Prologue belong in this category.

In Florence, Pisa, Perugia, and in Sienna, amongst other cities, the contests took on a more civic character. Townsmen fought using padded armour and clubs or other weapons. In Pisa, the massascudo involved the use of club and shield, the face on an inspirational consort was often painted on the shield.\(^{56}\) The ponte, battaglia desassi, elmora, and pugna were other localized forms of chivalric combat that culminated in the Venetian battagliola dei pugni (War of the Fists)\(^{57}\) or today’s Carnivale d’Ivrea, where the “battle of the oranges” celebrates a popular revolt whose origins have been lost. Many of Italy’s civic festivals mirror this one, in that they celebrate a historical event of importance to the city or town.

Prior to Fiore’s time, the master swordsman enters from time to time in civic records that suggest a tradition of inn-yard based teachers who earned a little money teaching what they knew to those who would pay.\(^{58}\) The Italian tendency to hire military expertise in the form of
condottieri captains perhaps made such a profession steady, and potentially lucrative. The very presence of martial companies suggests a role for the sword-master, especially if he was a respected captain in his own right, as Fiore may have been.

We do not know about the relationship between these informal teachers to the techniques, principles and pedagogies practiced by those pursuing arms as a profession, but there is little reason to expect that the techniques varied greatly, as efficiency is generally the objective for training with any weapon, civilian or military. Certainly the skills these men brought were applicable to both celebrations and duels in arms as well as in battle, since all took place along a spectrum of martial deeds of arms.

Surviving Treatises

Fiore’s work is to survive in four treatises as noted above. The aforementioned Pisani Dossi (PD) manuscript studied and published by Novati, dates to 1409-10. The J.P. Getty Museum in Los Angeles houses perhaps the most complete of the three.59 A third, probably incomplete copy is held in New York at the John Pierpoint Morgan Library. Most recently, a fourth has been rediscovered in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris, so-called the “Florius” owing to the Latinized version of Fiore’s name which appears on the manuscript itself.

The most well-known manuscript is the PD, based on Novati’s 1902 facsimile transcription.60 It is characterized by poorly rhyming couplets in Friulian with some Latin terms sprinkled throughout and reasonably well drawn figures accompanying the text. Two prologues precede the presentations of the techniques themselves, which include all of the weapon-sections present in the more complete Getty version, although some of the plays or techniques presented

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59 Fiore dei Liberi, Fior di Battaglia, Los Angeles, CA: J. P. Getty Museum, manuscript Ludwig
are slightly different. Some occur in one, but not in the other. This version is difficult and the language is far less descriptive than in the Morgan or Getty, although the text in the Florius is similar in form, but is not necessary an exact Latin rendition. Owing to the styles of clothing, armour and the more rudimentary character of the figure’s kinesthetic presentation, I strongly believe that this is the earliest of the four known surviving manuscripts. When Novati examined the original, probably around 1900, it consisted of 36 leaves, with 281 drawings, and it was unbound.

The second manuscript, only recently brought to light, is the *Arte Luctandi*, presently in the collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.\(^6\) We know much less about this one, as high-resolution scans have been difficult to acquire, but it appears to be closely related to the PD, insofar as it has the rhyming couplets (but in Latin) and kinesthetically similar figures. The figures are, however, colored; but there is no prologue. Paleography is difficult as the manuscript is in only fair condition, is plagued with abbreviations, and is further hampered by the low-resolution images presently available to researchers. I roughly date this copy to a period squarely between the PD and the Morgan/Getty set, approximately 1415, owing to the improved positions of the figures, but given the artistic and linguistic variances, it could originate from much earlier, perhaps as early as 1390. Further paleographic and artistic analysis may lend further insight.

Another version resides in the J.P. Morgan Library in New York, but this one consists of fifteen leaves and features just 108 drawings. It is known as M.0383, or, more colloquially, “the Morgan.” It could well be an abridged version of the Getty, or the larger 58-leaf version noted in

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the d’Este library inventory of 1436. That inventory mentions a work number 110, which has 15 leaves, but it does not appear after the inventory of 1508. Presumably this manuscript is also on vellum, probably with the same ox-gall ink and gilding as are found on the Getty. The text of the volume is substantially the same as the Getty, with only dialectic variance and a few content differences. The Morgan is not dedicated to Niccolò III, nor does it mention him. The order of the plays is also different than in the Getty; there are few poste, no abrazare, no spear, and no poleaxe plays. There is very little play in armour; one has the impression that the Morgan is but an incomplete collection of tricks, either a few favorites of a student / patron, is perhaps a teaser, or is a section of a larger work, now lost. There is evidence that it is unfinished, as there are several penciled illustrations mentioned in the Morgan card catalog (but which I have not seen). It is not a small volume, measuring 10 7/8” x 7 5/8”, very close to the modern 8 ½” x 11” size common in the United States.

The largest and most complete copy survives and is well preserved within the J.P. Getty museum in Los Angeles. It is there known as MS Ludwig XV 13, because it was acquired from the collection of Peter & Irene Ludwig, purchased through the agency of H.P. Kraus in New York, but the sale date is unknown. A physical description taken from the sale catalog follows:

Manuscript on vellum, written in a clear Italian Gothic book hand. 2 cols. 47 leaves (ff. 3-5 blanks). With 291 splendid pen drawings, by the author: one full-page (f.32); one half-page (f.47); the rest mostly quarter-page; many burnished with gold details on the figures, and a few with silver details. Folio 280 x 205mm. Italian blind tooled light brown calf (c. 1800). From the libraries of Niccolò III d’Este, Marchese of Ferrara, with his name in large gold letters, with penwork decoration. In the dedicatory passage, f.1 verso; Niccolò Marcello di Santa Maria; Apostolo Zeno (1668-1750); Luigi Cелоitti (c. 1789-

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62 Francesco Novati again gives useful citations in his notes, but there is a curiosity. The final entry lists the inventory number as 111, not 110. Novati takes this to be an error by Bartolomeo Silvestri, when he mixed up the entry with another treatise on war, which was in the library. Investigation on what manuscript 110 and 111 were is ongoing. Here are the applicable library inventories: “1436: Libro uno de fatti de arme fato per M° fiorio et da combatiere in membrane couerto de una carta senza alueu [V. Camera c.39 & Capelli, p. 18],” “1467: Liber in Arte Duelli in cartis membranis forma parua littera cursiuia in columns editus per Florium Fruiolensem cohopterus carta pecudna sine tabulis cartarum 15. Singatus numero 110. [V. Cancelleria, c.4],” “1480: Libro da combatere, no. 110 [V. Camera, c.7],” “1508: Item liber Florii Furliani sine albis. In papiro no. 111 [sic] [V. Cancellerita c.15].”
Like the Morgan, the Getty has full paragraph, rich descriptions of the techniques and principles explored in Fiore’s *arte d’armizare*. Although they are written in the Friulian dialect, they are not difficult to read. Like the Morgan, it contains a single Prologue, in which Fiore gives what limited biographical information as is available on him, and introduces the key in which the rest of the manuscript is encoded. Fine ox-gall pen and ink illustrations accompany most of the paragraphs, and there is a very strong resemblance to artists of the Veronese school, students of Altichiero, working after 1384.64

These manuscripts may be further broken down into two groups. The PD and Florius are likely earlier versions of Fiore’s work. While this opinion runs contrary to the dating believed by many modern students of Fiore, the armour and clothing, as well as the kinesthetic efficiency and the pedagogical development in the first two treatises which I date between the PD and the Morgan/Getty, probably to sometime between 1390 and 1415, based on an analysis of the armour and clothing depicted, as well as their kinesthetic development. The Morgan/Getty group are far more sophisticated in terms of their representation of human mechanics, but whether this is based on an improved understand of efficiency or because the Veronese artists who executed the Getty/Morgan treatises were more skilled, remains uncertain. What does seem certain that the sense of completeness and maturity present in the Getty/Morgan treatises, as compared to the incompleteness of the PD/Florius manuscripts in terms of their quality, depth of explanation, and

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63 From the sale catalog, obtained from the Getty Museum, Los Angeles. After this the manuscript was sold to Peter and Irene Ludwig, from a Sothebys auction in 1966. Personal communication with Matthew Galas. It seems likely that the present leather binding was done at the behest of Luigi Celotti, probably in London.

64 I have done a deeper analysis of this possibility, including comparisons of drawings between figures in Fiore and with other artists working in the school of Altichiero in my *Sword in Two Hands*, op. cit., 23-27.
comprehension of kinesthetic mechanics. For this reason, I will rely mainly on the Getty, referring to the PD, Florius or Morgan only when they offer important variations.

“L’Arte d’Armizare”

Fiore called his system the *arte d’armizare*. The reader will recall that “art” was defined in Aristotle and in Cicero as a collection of principles that, when mastered, allow free innovation within the natural parameters that define the art. The artist knows *why* he does what he does, as opposed to the craftsman, who merely knows *what* or *how*. Because Fiore did not call out many of his principles directly, as Döbringer did, the mixed methods approach suggested by Francesco Novati is necessary in order to decipher the *arte d’armizare*, combining insights gained from textual and iconographic analysis, kinesthetic theory, and experimental archeology.

Additionally, I continue to emphasize the horizontal comparative approach, drawing from Döbringer’s work because it is the nearest temporal analogue, but I also make some lineal comparisons as well, occasionally showing how the principles used by Fiore manifest in Italian swordsmanship in successive periods where the later masters explain principles to which Fiore adhered, but did not articulate directly.

I argue that, taken in its historical context, Fiore’s *arte d’armizare* expressed and tightly integrated precepts of the medieval martial arts which, within the technological and cultural framework of the period, maximized efficiency and effectiveness. The *arte d’armizare* shared most of these precepts with those expressed in the German *kunst des fechten* and RA MS I.33,

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65 As we will examine later in the chapter, Fiore at first expressed his idea as a set of distinct arts; one governing grappling, one for dagger, etc. It was only with the Getty manuscript that he seems to have drawn the individual forms together into a cohesive whole.

66 It seems unlikely that Fiore would have come into direct contact with Aristotle, but it is certainly possible that he learned of Aristotle’s concept through Cicero’s *de inventione*, which according to Robert Black was a standard text in Latin instruction of the period. See Black, op. cit.
not necessarily because of direct influence, although this may well have been important, but because the governing principles dictated similar efficient solutions. This same logic explains why many of the techniques shown in the European martial arts parallel or duplicate those found in Asian martial arts. There need not be cultural contact for parallel solutions to emerge because the efficient maximization of power and precision using shock weapons is defined by the constraints of the human body as a machine (the mechanical principles of kinesiology), and human cultural frameworks (which may have an influence on the cognitive aspects of kinesiology in terms of motor learning and control).\textsuperscript{67} It seems likely that cultural issues provide variation within the efficiency model of martial employment of weapons-use, but that the ultimate arbiter of cultural variation would be combat effectiveness.

\textit{Development of the Arte d’armizare}

I believe that the surviving manuscripts by Fiore demonstrate his development as a \textit{magistro}, beginning with the relatively crude presentation in the Pisani-Dossi, dated to 1410. In the PD, Fiore approaches his art as a collection of techniques, loosely bound together. Indeed in the PD, he refers to the \textit{luds armorum}\textsuperscript{68} and to \textit{armiçar e de conbatere},\textsuperscript{69} alongside an undefined \textit{artis}.	extsuperscript{70} In the second \textit{Prologo} of the PD manuscript, he refers to particular arts as applied to their

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{67} Most of the kinesiological research I have reviewed begins from the assumption that human beings are essentially similar. Kinesiological researchers tend to approach the body and brain as a system. No motor learning and control research that I have seen takes into account the cultural background of the subjects, and a potentially interesting line of research would be to replicate some of the landmark studies in the field to see if there is perhaps a cultural vector that influences how the body learns and executes movement. I hypothesize that there \textit{will} be differences sufficient to spawn a new field, “cultural” kinesiology, which would explore those differences.

\textsuperscript{68} Literally, the “play” of arms.

\textsuperscript{69} Literally the “use” of arms. While John Florio’s 1598 dictionary has no word for the verb, it is clearly derived from the noun “armes,” meaning having to do with weapons and arms. Florio is indispensable for attempting to understand the historical meaning of terms whose meanings may well have changed since the sixteenth century. Unfortunately, the work does date to the final years of the sixteenth century, but it is a better reference than using a modern dictionary, such as the Garzanti.

\textsuperscript{70} L’arte only appears once alone in the first \textit{Prologo}, and only twice in the second. However, in the first, Fiore loosely defines it as \textit{artis ingenia capescenda, uelet ensis lance dagardi nec minus brachii ludendi pedester vel}
weapon, rather than to a coherent whole, the *l’arte d’abraçar* and the *l’arte che apertene a la daga*, “the art of embracing (grappling),” and “of the art that pertains to the dagger.” At this point the art has no name; it merely is.

By the time of the Getty and Morgan manuscripts, however, he refers to his approach now as *Fiore si fatta arte d’armizare*, and he now provides a bit more detail about those he claims to have studied with, and now that he had by then, *In tanto à impressa questa arte che lo ditto Fiore à stado più e più volte richesto da molti signori e chavallieri e scudieri per imprender del ditto Fiore*, “To completely understand this art, I, the aforementioned Fiore, stayed more and more with many lords, knights, squires, in order that I could learn it….” The art has a name, rather than a laundry list of associated techniques, and the presentation throughout the Getty and Morgan treatises are far more mature in terms of kinesiological efficiency, artistic depiction, logical organization, naming and technical progressions. There is within the Morgan and Getty a more solid tactical presentation, woven into an algorithmic decision tree, based on probability assessments, designed to guide the combatant using the principles that govern the art.

**Presentation and Pedagogy**

His presentation in the Novati mirrors that of the grammar books through which he was likely to have been taught to read and write, as he claims he could in the *Prologhi* as quoted above. The rhyming couplets are strikingly similar to early grammar book rubrics, but, as...
Robert Black as shown, this older “couplet” method was supplanted around the turn of the fourteenth century by an emphasis on prose. We find the same development track within the corpus of Fiore’s treatises. First, in the PD, dating to 1410, the work is relatively crude and parallels the couplet-rubrics common in Italian grammar schools during the period when Fiore would have potentially had access to a basic education. In his next treatise, the Florius, the depictions are improved but the problematic and relatively crude rhyming couplets were continued. But by the time of the Morgan/Getty manuscripts, he has refined not only the physical efficiency of the figures depicted, but he has also jettisoned some superfluous poste (guards) and added explanatory paragraphs that convey a much greater depth of understanding of both the technique and their organization into a coherent system he begins to refer to as the Arte d’Armizare. The prose explanations reflect grammar school teaching post-1400, again according to Black, and this would make sense if we believe that these later two books were directed by Fiore, but scribed and drawn by artists and scriviners or secretaries in the employ of the man who commissioned the works, Nicholas d’Este III. The scriviners could well have had access to the newer techniques of writing. This is a much more elegant, mature and complete picture and thus it seems highly unlikely that the Getty and Morgan manuscripts predate the Pisani-Dossi and Parisian Florius. Similarly, because the Getty manuscript is the more nuanced and complete of the later pair, it must stand as the main reference text if reconstructing the arte d’armizare is an objective.

exposed. Particularly interesting is the process of phased development, from “imitation and adaptation,” which I believe captures Fiore’s communications ability and his understanding of his subject. The rhyming couplets found in Fiore’s two earliest treatises, the Pisani-Dossi and the Florius, reflect the older tradition of Latin teaching, probably used in Cividale and Premarriacco during the 1360-80 period during which Fiore leaned his letters. Here his communication techniques are still “imitative.” In the more prose-centric methods that supplanted the diptych verse also parallel Fiore’s more mature text as expressed in the Morgan and Getty manuscripts. As his understanding deepened, his expression became more adaptive.
All four treatises include a diverse set of weapons that include unarmed combat—abrazzare, “embracing” or grappling—fighting with and against the bastonçello “baton,” daga “dagger,” spada “sword,” lanza “spear,” and azza “poleaxe,” in and out of armour, on foot and on horseback. Not all of the weapons are included in all four manuscripts, and the order is inconsistent. Each section begins with a series of positions—poste or guardie—followed by techniques known as zoghi, or “plays.”

The illustrations are generally of a high quality, the figures depicting without much ambiguity the foot placement, position of the hands and of the weapons. This is a welcome change from the I.33 manuscript, where artistic traditions or conventions make the images difficult to interpret with certainty. The figures are for the most part dressed in light jackets Fiore refers to as zuperelli, which seems to be equivalent to the English terms “gambeson” or “arming coat.” The coats are belted, and the legs are encased in close-fitting chausses also depicted in paintings from the 1400-1420 period. For the armoured combatants, we have a fascinating period depicted, as the transitional armour of the late fourteenth century gives way to the full cap à pied, fully-encasing white armour for which the Northern Italians were justifiably famous for the next two hundred years.

Above each figure is text. In the PD and Florius manuscripts, the text consists, as has been discussed above, of short rhyming couplets which are not terribly descriptive. In the Morgan and Getty manuscripts, by contrast, we find longer descriptive prose, usually a long paragraph, which discusses crucial elements of the technique and, sometimes, about the principle

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75 Because of this inconsistency, it is hard to support the argument that has been advanced within the practitioner community, that all Fiore’s work is based upon grappling, because the grappling or abrazzare section begins both the Getty and PD manuscripts. The grappling is missing in the incomplete Morgan, and equestrian techniques begin the Florius, as last in its current binding.
which it represents. More often, the principle is unstated. However, important tactical choices are generally presented in the written portion, giving an alternative resolution or “follow on” to the action depicted in the play itself.

Combat begins, as Fiore details in the Prologo, when the combatants adopt their respective poste and, possibly through a short series of transitions, strive to find one that conveys a momentary positional advantage versus the opponent and his own position; then, he must move immediately—subito—with an effort to strike using one of the six fundamental blows—known as colpi. This must be done while under cover, because the combatant must not expose himself unnecessarily.

Groups of techniques are bound together by weapon type, resulting in a short grappling section (when included), a very long dagger section, a section on the sword in one hand—then in two—and then a short section that shows variations of the use of the sword against a fully armoured opponent. Short sections are included for the spear, poleaxe and equestrian combat, and I posit they are shorter because these sections depict only unique characteristics based on the different performance dynamics of the weapons—the principles remained the same and the principles and techniques presented with the other weapons could and should have been readily applied.

The PD, Morgan and Getty all begin with a Prologo, (two, in the case of the PD), in which Fiore logically provides the key needed to understand the progressions of techniques which will follow. Three of the four manuscripts, saving the potentially incomplete Morgan, contain a page known as the segno, which lays out the virtues Fiore believed were necessary in a combatant. Although the principles of the arte d’armizare are never called out as principles

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76 Fiore defines poste in the Getty mss. in the Prologo on fol. 2r, E tanto à dire poste che l’omo se guarda e se defende cum quella de le feride del suo inimigo. “And it’s enough to say that poste that the man guards and defends himself with them from the wounds [intended] by his enemy.”
within the text, a blended study that weaves kinesiological, experimental archeological, textual methods in a comparative matrix with the German material covered previously will reveal a remarkably efficient and effective martial art that probably represents a clear distillation of how men fought (if they fought well) during the later Middle Ages. It is the “ancient science” referred to by Achille Marozzo in his 1536 *Opera Nuova*, not necessarily referring to Fiore in particular, but to the long understanding of fighting principles which had been developed and refined by Marozzo’s ancestors.77

Part of Fiore’s encoding of principles is expressed within the text itself, as in the *segno* and in the *Prologo*, where he is suitably clear. But other principles are more subtly encoded, such as his tactical system, which lies neither in the text nor in the illustrations, but in the order the plays are presented in.

In the *Prologo* of the Getty mss., he begins by gathering the formerly disparate elements of the *arti* into a single *arte d’armizare*:

Chosì come questi magistri e zugadore ano a reçere l’arte d’armizare in arme e sença arme reçere l’arte de la lança, cum la lança, e loro guardie magistri e zugadori. Et per simile cum la azza et cum la spada d’una mano e de doy mani e per lo simile cum la daga si che per efetto questi magistri e zugadori detti denançi cum le insegne loro e devise ano a rezerre tutta l’arte d’armizare a pè, a cavallo in arme e senç’arme secondo ch’elli fano le in lo zogho del abraçare e questo s’intende solamente peroché chosi bisogna esser guardie e magistri in le altre arte e remidij e contrararij, come in l’arte d’abraçare a zoché lo libro si possa liçamente intendere bencché le rubriche e le figure e li zoghi mostrano tutta l’arte si bene che tutta la si porà intendere. Ora atendemo a le figure depinte e a lor zoghi et a loro parole le quale ne mostrarà la veritude.78

This is how masters and combatants have received their *arte d’armizare*, in and out of armour, learning the art of the spear with the spear and its guarding masters and techniques. And likewise with the poleaxe and with the sword in one hand and in two hands, and with the dagger, and to this end I have studied the masters and players mentioned above, and through their experience, I have learned the whole of the art of arms on foot, on horseback, in and out of armour. I have subsequently taken this experience and presented it in the plays of the abrazzare solely because this is necessary

77 Novati, op. cit., p. 80.
78 Fiore dei Liberi, *Fiore di Battaglia*, op. cit., fol. 2r, lines 153-177.
to make the guards and masters in the other arts and remedies and counters, as is done in
the art of the abrazzare, such that the book intends to best present the rubrics and figures
and the plays which demonstrate the whole art that is good; such is my intention. One
needs only to attend to the figures depicted, their plays and their words to see the truth in
what I say.

Fiore then offers the keys to decoding the book, which describe four levels of combat;
the *primi magistri de la bataglia*, the “first masters of battle,” the one who strikes first, but while
under the protection of his guard or *poste*.79 If struck first, he must reply to immediately (*subito*)
retrieve the initiative, responding with a *remedio*, which he also calls the *seconno magistro de la
bataglia*. But, as Fiore recognizes, there is always a counter. Opposing techniques available to
the original attacker are termed *contrarii* or counters, or *contra-remidij*, comprising the *terzo
magistro di batalia*. Finally, *contra-contrarii* are the final *quarto magistri di batalia*, but these are
rare in the text. Thus, Fiore attempts to efficiently end the combat in the fewest steps possible;
generally in one to three steps, and in a few cases only, as many as four. This is a far cry from
the random bashing that evolutionary progressives and Hollywood scriptwriters have envisioned
for combat during the medieval period. Fiore’s *arte d’armizare* emphasizes precision, strength,
and efficiency—not uncontrolled or inefficient smashing.

Fiore tells us that the masters are depicted wearing a crown—gold leafed in all four
manuscripts—and his senior students, who demonstrate the techniques, wear a garter just under
the knee, which is also gold-leafed. These students work against opponents Fiore terms *zugadori*,
or “players,” echoing the ludic tone of the I.33 treatise discussed in chapter 3. In the case of the
first masters, they represent the beginning of a sequence, much like the crosses in I.33 also
denote a new sequence. But the key is more nuanced and complicated; a counter-master is
sometimes interjected into the text, but he is the starting point that follows until the reader comes
upon the next master.

79 Fiore dei Liberi, *Fior di Battaglia*, op. cit., fol. 2r.
In Fiore’s treatise, however, each technique is merely used to illustrate a principle of the art.\textsuperscript{80} This is an extremely important point, because throughout the text, Fiore logically examines the order in which combat choices will be made, from the most distant to the least, providing options from play to play that can be constructed into an “if then” probability assessment. For example, following a crossing of the swords, one can either continue with a \textit{volta stabile} to strike if his guard is complete; but if it is more perfect on that side, the combatant may use a \textit{mezza volta} or half turn to quickly strike to the other side. Fiore does not prescribe any actions in advance; instead, he provides combat options. These options demonstrate the core principles of the \textit{arte d’armizare} as Fiore understood it, and an adept student of his art may use them to freely innovate in response to his opponent, maintaining his combat flexibility. This is a combat model that enables students to rapidly assess the opponent’s position and likely intentions, reducing the mental cycle time needed to find and deliver a creative solution response (Fiore’s \textit{remedij} or \textit{contrarij}).

Principles

Because Fiore’s text is so long and complex, I here demonstrate only a few of the principles expressed within the manuscripts that link to the broader corpus of European martial arts as examined in previous chapters but which apply equally to other surviving texts not included here.

\textsuperscript{80} Fiore does not call out this technique within the text. However, through long years going through the whole text repeatedly, using kinesiological mechanics and tactical analysis, I believe that I have identified a number of unstated but still foundational principles. This kind of analysis attempts to see between the written lines, assessing that the figures and descriptions have in common; these common elements may be said to be foundational principles. Although they are not expressly called out in the text, as we will see in the examples that follow, they are surprisingly similar to those we found in the German systems examined earlier.
Beyond the Prologhi, Fiore expresses principles in the segni, best translated as “signs” or “teaching drawings.” On these pages, Fiore suggests four foundational virtues that combatants must have, in addition to showing various strikes—colpi—and denoting opposing guards. In the center of the drawing is a clothed man, superimposed over which are seven swords and around which four animals are arrayed. Each of the swords represents an angle of attack, and each of the animals a martial quality that the combatant must have in order to be successful. As Fiore writes in the PD Prologue:

Poy trouariti uno homo incoronadi cum septe spade adosso cum iiiij figure intorno e si se pora uedere zo che a asingificar le dicte figure spade.82

We will find a crowned man with seven swords arrayed with four figures around him, to see if he can see the significance of the said figures and swords.

The segno appears on carta 17a of the PD manuscript, where it precedes the section on the sword in two hands, and on fol.32 of the Getty, where it follows the sword in two hands immediately before the section on the sword in armour. Curiously, it does appear in the Morgan at all. The Getty segno opens with a short declaration explaining its purpose:

Questo magistro cum queste spade significa gli setti colpi de la spada. Et lli quatro animali significa quatro vertù, zoè avisamento, presteza, forteza, e ardimento. A qui vole esser bono in questa arte questa vertù conven de lor aver parte.83

This master with the seven swords signifies the seven colpi of the sword. And the four animals signify four virtues, known as avisamento (judgment), presteza (speed), forteza (strength), and ardimento (ardor). He who wants to do well in the Art, of each virtue must he have part.

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81 It is because of this that many students and some scholars refer to this as the “swords” or “seven swords” drawing.
82 Fiore dei Liberi, Flos Duellatorum, op. cit., carta 2a.
83 Fiore dei Liberi, Fior di Battaglia, Getty mss., op. cit., 32r.
Turning our attention first to the swords, as Fiore writes, there are seven; one for each of the attacks he discusses earlier in the treatise. There are no words that accompany the swords in the Getty version of the *segno*, but there are words written around the swords on the PD
describing the key poste: poste di donna destra, posta di donna sinestra, posta di finestra destra, posta di finestra sinestra, posta longa, posta breve, tutta porta di ferro, mezana porta di ferro, and dente di zenghiaro. From these places the seven attacks are efficiently made, a quick-reference for the most important poste.

The two downward-sloping swords traversing the shoulders represent the fendenti, those in the middle the mezani, and the two angled rising strikes the sotani. The one in the center represents the punta, or thrust. The primary attacks in the system are comprised of these strikes, an efficient summary that strongly resembles similar attack series in later Italian swordplay and in modern stick combat systems.84

What is perhaps more important in the long run are the four martial virtues Fiore offers, embodied through his four animals. Arrayed around the magistro are four animals, the ellefante at the bottom, the tigro at his right, the lione at his left, and the cervino (lynx) above his head. Each animal symbolizes well understood qualities, and taken in balance, a man must possess all four if he is to do well in the art. In the PD version, Fiore writes:

Noy semo quarto animali de tal conplezione;
Chi uole armiçar de noy faça conpartatione;
E chi de nostre uertù harà bona parte
In arme hauerà honor chomo dise larte.85

We are the four animals of such contemplation;
Who the combatant wants to make a part;
And whose virtues must he have a good part
Thus armed will a man have honor in this art.

This is substantially the same as in the Getty’s script, but it has perhaps a different tone. Interestingly, there is a slight variance in the naming of the virtues within the manuscripts, but

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84 For example, Achille Marozzo has a similar swords diagram that includes the sword but dispenses with the animal-based symbology. In modern escrima, for example, the attacking diagram is identical.
85 Fiore dei Liberi, Flos Duellatorum, op. cit., carta 17b.
their descriptions remain remarkably constant. Perhaps these are teaching rubrics similar to the Johannes Liechtenauer’s zettel. The verses below are from the Getty manuscript:

Elephant

\[\text{Forteza [PD – fortudio]}
\text{Ellefante son e uno castello ho per cargho,}
\text{E non me incenochio ni perdo uargho.}\]

I am the Elephant, and a castle I am charged to carry.
And I do not kneel, nor lose my way.

Fiore’s elephant stands at the foot of the diagram, standing upon a small, flat base-plate. It forms the base upon which the rest of the art rests, the art’s foundation. The elephant represents stability, strength, and an ownership of the combatant’s ground.

In a medieval context, according to the Aberdeen Bestiary, the Elephant was one of the greatest of beasts, and importantly, it was a common belief that the elephant did not rise if he fell. This parallels Fiore’s lack of ground-fighting, and his strong preference to put the opponent onto the ground, without being taken to the ground himself.

The elephant may have carried other great symbolism for Fiore’s audience. The Aberdeen Bestiary adds that the Elephant represents innocent goodness (for he represented Adam), a creature who cared for the wounded, who knew nothing of adultery, and who defended his mate. The Bestiary also records the Great Elephant as a symbol for the civilizing law that stands as a bulwark against sin. They were (and are) thought to be of a very high intelligence.

Fiore associates the Elephant with \textit{fortudio} and \textit{forteza}, or strength. His steadfast nature supports a citadel upon his back, and combined it is a potent fighting platform, known to the Italians of the day as a weapon employed by the Persians and Indians.

\[86\text{ Fiore dei Liberi, Fior di Battaglia, Getty mss., op. cit., fol. 32r.}\]
Tiger

Presteza [PD celeritas] – tigro
Yo tigro tanto son presto a corer e uoltare,
Che la sagita del cello non me pò.87

I am the tiger quick enough to run and turn
that arrow from the sky (lightning)88 cannot catch me.

Fiore’s tiger may not be Giotto-like in its realism, but the tiger’s association with lightning stands for initiative, physical and mental speed, the benefits of natural speed and/or training. The tigro clutches an arrow in his paw, the satiga del cello or “arrow of the sky,” a metaphor for lightning.

Medieval and early Renaissance writers had little direct experience with tigers, often confusing them with other big cats, such as panthers or cheetahs. But the idea of the tiger seems well represented within the most famous medieval Bestiary, the Aberdeen:

The tiger is named after its swift flight: the Persians, Greeks and Medes call it, “the arrow.” It is a beast with colorful spots, of extraordinary qualities and swiftness, after which the River Tigris is named because it is the swiftest of all rivers.89

In addition to speed, medieval legend held that tigresses could be captured through the use of a mirror or reflective sphere by taking advantage of their extraordinary devotion to their cubs—their fidelity. Real tigers stalk their prey and then ambush them in a lightning attack. They are silent, deadly killers. Fiore’s tiger rests near the right hand, the hand that controls the sword. Like the sagita del cello, the sword can strike like lightning—fast, unpredictably, and with unerring precision.

87 Ibid.
88 I am again indebted to Mr. Colin Hatcher, who provided this reference.
Lion

_Ardimento [PD – Audatia] – lione_
Più de mi lione non porta cor ardito,
Però de batalia faço a zaschaduno inuito.\(^{90}\)

None have more courage than I, the Lion,
but in battle I make each an invitation.

The lion’s audacious courage is symbolized by the lion, which, at the left side, holds a heart in his paw, the symbol for strength and character. As he says, none have more courage than the lion, but in battle the lion invites each to combat. He does not rush in head over heels, but he tempers his audacity with the lynx’s wisdom. He invites, and then pounces in a frontal assault.

He is the king of beasts, full of pride, but noble and merciful. In medieval lore the lion emerges much as he is now. The lion was believed to eschew the killing of women, children and the ill. That they ate in moderation only. His commanding roar dominated all other beasts, but could be killed through deception and falsehood (such as a snake’s bite or a scorpion’s sting).

Lynx

_Avisamento [PD – Prudentia] – ceruino (lynx)_
Meio de mi louo ceruino non uede creatura;
E aquello meto sempre a sesto e mesura.\(^{91}\)

Better than my lynx’s eyes does no creature see,
with which I always make with a compass and a measure.

The medieval lynx, _cervino_, was associated with alertness, keen eyesight and hearing. Unlike the domestic lynx, the Eurasian Lynx is a big cat, with bold eyes and a beautiful spotted coat, like Fiore’s depiction. In his paws he holds a set of dividers—a measuring tool. The

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\(^{90}\) Fiore dei Liberi, _Fior di Battaglia_, Getty mss., op. cit., fol. 32v.

\(^{91}\) Ibid.
Cervino or lynx stands for measure, insight, knowledge, and that most important quality, judgment.

In the Middle Ages the lynx was associated with sharp vision, but there was also a sense that it was not a big cat but a member of the wolf family,\(^{92}\) and as such it was sometimes associated with envy. But more commonly, it became an image for the all-seeing nature of Christ, who knew the wicked thoughts of his listeners (Matthew 22:8), as we find in Paul: “there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account (Heb 4:13).” It is far more likely that this all-seeing nature was what Fiore intended.

Within its paws the cervino grasps the compass or divider, a measuring instrument familiar to masons and artisans of all kinds. Using a divider, distance could be measured. The sextant, derived from the sesto, was used by navigators to locate their position with precise measurements of the stars in celestial navigation. The lynx thus measures not only physical distance, but the whole nature of the fight, arriving at a sound judgment through which he may govern the other animals.

The Man Himself

At the center of the segno is the combatant himself. Medieval beasts were thought to be ruled by their wills, free to be led wherever their instincts willed them to go. But man is different than beasts because he is ruled by reason, and through both reason and enlightenment he can become moral, and through morality he is fit to rule.

Each of Fiore’s beasts wears a collar, symbolizing that the creature is captured, harnessed, controlled by the man in the center. It is the man himself who must tame or harness

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the beasts, directing them to do his will. As the first part of the segno says, he must have a part of each. Stepping further from the written text, they must be in balance and brought to bear with judgment. A strong combatant much possess each animal in appropriate measure.

Interestingly, the later German manuscript by Paulus Kal also features a kind of “segno” illustration, where the man himself is morphed with animalistic characteristics in order to convey similar meanings.93 Around the same time, Filippo Vadi offers a segno of his own, inspired by Fiore but not complicated and more reflective of his much more time-sensitive art.94

Principles in the L’Arte d’Armizare

Another place where principles are articulated openly in the text is in the short introductory sections that precede the individual weapon sections. Many of these are found in the large dagger section. Note that this is only true in the Getty and Morgan manuscripts; in the PD and Florius, much less information is provided in these “header” sections, another point that suggests the greater maturity of the Getty and Morgan treatises. I refer to these sections often when surveying the principles below.

For the rest of the principles, rather than following the text in a linear fashion, I identify themes which arise again and again. Still other themes are unwritten foundational elements that define and underlie Fiore’s arte d’armizare, and for these, I have relied on the blend of kinesiological mechanical and tactical analyses in order to discover common elements that define the system, but which are unwritten. Nonetheless, they are expressed. Another set of themes, such as the tactical decision trees, are also not called out in the text but are found in the order of

93 Paulus Kal, Fechtbüch, Bayerisches Staatsbibliotek Munichen, CGM 1507, fol. 6r., Ich hab augri als ein falk das man mich nit beschalk, ich hab hertz als ein leo das ich hin zu streb, ich hab fües als ein hind das ich hin zu und dar von spring.
94 Filippo Vadi, Liber de arte gladiatoria dimicandi, Biblioteca Nazionale, Rome, Fondo Vittorio Emmanuele, MS 1342.
presentation for the figures. In order words, the order in which material is presented is part of the
Fiore’s pedagogical method and certain principles are coded therein. I also compare these
principles to those previously identified in the German treatise in order to establish some of the
core principles which appear to have bound European martial arts from the period. In the final
chapters I consider how these principles manifest in late medieval society and how they can
contribute to our understanding of martial culture of the period.

Unity of Principle

Principles that apply to one weapon also apply to the others. Differences in the
presentation within the text are based more on varying dynamics of the weapons than in any
difference in the core operating principles. In the dagger header section, for example, where
Fiore presents the five poste for the dagger, he expressed this plainly, Questa zinque figure sone
le guardie dela daga. E tale è bona in arme e tale è e bona senza arme…., “These five figures are
the guards of the dagger. And certain ones are good when unarmed, and certain ones are good
when armed.”95 Two of the five repeat throughout the text, and Fiore usually presents them first;
tutta porta di ferro, the “complete” or “whole iron gate” and mezza porta di ferro, the “middle”
or “half iron gate” are depicted also with the sword in one hand and in two, in the unarmed
abrazare or grappling section, with the sword in two hands, with the spear and poleaxe. The
principles that govern the arte d’armizare hold true for all weapons, whether they are normally
employed as weapons or not—at one point, Fiore shows how to make a defense with a hat and/or
a pair of gloves.96

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95 Fiore dei Liberi, Getty mss., op. cit., fol. 9r.
96 Ibid., fol. 8v.
The dagger section is quite long in all surviving versions of the manuscript, and quite a few of the core principles of the *arte d’armizare* are first demonstrated or articulated in this section. The following sections for the sword in one hand and in two are shorter, but are still substantial. Sections devoted to armoured combat with swords—where the sword is gripped *mezzamente* along the blade—the spear, poleaxe and *bastonçello* are very short. The reason that these sections are so short is that the foundational principles have, by that point in the text, been shown with the grappling, dagger and sword sections, so there is little need to repeat them.
Indeed, in the section on the *azza*—the “poleaxe”—he writes, *io son porta di ferro mezana a doy mane cum la spada*…, “I am in *porta di ferro mezana* in two hands like the sword.”97 Fiore makes frequent comparative statements like this all through the text, often ending a zoghi or play with words like “from here one can finish like the third master of the dagger.”

This point also is consistent for the Liechtenauer system. The core *leger* of the system—*Ochs, Pflug, Alber*, and *vom Tag*—are repeated for the spectrum of weapons treated, including the sword, spear and poleaxe.

In the same way, the strikes with all weapons are all thrown the same way, and Fiore classifies them as downward striking, *fendenti*; middle-wise striking, *mezani*; or rising, *sottani*. These strikes are shown expressly with the sword and dagger, but they are implicit with the axe and fist. The *lanza* or spear instead uses thrusts—*punte*—but these too are shown on the dagger and sword sections, as well as on the *segno* itself.

The principle of unity may be seen clearly in the equestrian section. Here, Fiore teaches his students to set aside the incoming lance, the very same technique he uses with the spear, sword and dagger. This can be a hard “rebating” motion that breaks (*rompere*) the incoming strike, driving it down, or a softer displacement (*scambiare*, or a “change” of places). It can be made in front of the lance—a *rebattendo*—or behind—a *redoppiando*—the very same distinctions shown with the grappling, dagger, sword, spear and poleaxe sections. Fighting on horseback is simply a matter of applying the principles from the saddle, rather than from the feet. Even with the unique dynamics of a couched lance, the unity principle suggests that principles the combatant has learned through any of the other weapons will have some application.

Additionally, Fiore’s solution for overcoming a fully armed man is the same as is presented in the German material. Fiore says that he grips the sword on the blade, *mezzamente*,

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97 Fiore dei Liber, Getty fol. 35v.
or “middle-wise,” using it like a short, vicious spear or axe, using it to thrust between the plates or to take control of the opponent by finding the same locks and holds demonstrated in the dagger section.\footnote{Fiore dei Liberi, Getty mss., op. cit., fols. 32v – 35r.} Combatants in the Liechtenauer system show this same approach, in a grip there termed *halbschwert*, “half-sword.” We see this grip depicted on fols. 21v – 33r in the beautifully wrought oversize fight-book by Paulus Kal,\footnote{Paulus Kal, *Fechtbüch*, published as Christian Henry Tobler, trans., *In Service of the Duke: The 15th century fighting treatise of Paulus Kal*, Highland Village, TX: Chivalry Bookshelf, 2006.} but the techniques are referred to also in the book by Sigmund Ringeck,\footnote{Sigmund Ringeck, *Fechtbüch*, published as Christian Henry Tobler, *Secrets of German Medieval Swordsmanship, Sigmund Ringeck’s Commentaries on Liechtenauer’s Verse*, Union City, CA: Chivalry Bookshelf, 2001.} in the *Codex Wallerstein*,\footnote{Published as Grzegorz Zabiński and Bartlomiej Walczak, *Codex Wallerstein: a medieval fighting book from the fifteenth century on the longsword, falchion, dagger, and wrestling*, Boulder, CO: Paladin Press, 2002.} and many others. Throughout the corpus of German texts, as in Fiore’s treatises, there is a unity that defines common principles from weapon to weapon. Ultimately, as Fiore suggests in his text, the principles may be applied to any hand weapon, *mio magistro posso fare e cum uno capuzo overo una corda te faria altretale*, “my master can make [this] and with a hat or even a cord [belt?] this can be done.”\footnote{Fiore dei Liberi, Getty mss., op. cit., fol. 8v.}

Principle of Guards (*Covertarsi*)

Another core principle of the system is that combatants must maximize their own protection—their personal security—at all times. It is done through the use of Fiore’s *guardie* or *poste*, and it is particularly important in the unarmoured play with a single weapon, such as with the sword in one hand or two, where the sword must simultaneously strike and defend. This principle is carefully observed throughout the *arte d’armizare*, despite the criticisms of later progressive evolutionist historians, who failed to see it. In several instances Fiore calls this
principle out expressly, as he does introducing the dagger, è di questi cinque zoghi uno l’altro non abbandona, chi sa defender si guardi la persona, “and of these five plays go with each other, such that he who knows how to defend will keep his body safe.”

Principle of Power

Like the arts of Liechtenauer described earlier, Fiore’s *arte d’armizare* was built around the smooth application of efficient power. The movement framework, defined through the system of *guardie* or *poste* to be discussed later, anchored the weapons—be they hands, daggers, swords, spears or poleaxes—at the kinesthetically strongest points at the hip or shoulder, the same points used in modern stick and ball sports to maximize power. Movements are made as transitions between these *poste*, such that the combatant’s weapon is always anchored at a point where it has potential energy stored within the body’s large muscle groups.

All strikes, which Fiore calls *colpi*, are thrown using a full passing step, which serves to coordinate the body’s large muscle groups with the delivery of a blow, be it a strike with the edge or a thrust. In the Getty manuscript only, which as noted previously seems to most kinesthetically mature of the four, Fiore identifies several preferred poste which he classifies as *pulsativa*, or striking guards. He uses these guards to attack into the opponent’s weapon in order to fix it in place or to cover against an incoming strike with power.

Within his *zoghi* or plays, there are no plays which are delivered without substantial power. In some cases, strikes are made in order to set up a more definitive finish. Unlike the later German systems, Fiore’s grounded pose draws power from the body’s center and centers the weapons around the body’s core for maximum power at the cost of speed. The German system expressed in late fifteenth century manuscripts, by contrast, keeps the main guard above the

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103 Ibid., fol. 9v.
shoulders, emphasizing fast, multiple attacks which focus on the head and hands first. It is not clear, however, whether this interpretation of Liechtenauer is faithful to the original prior to 1389. The reader will recall from chapter 3 that the use of underpowered attacks was expressly forbidden.

In Fiore, raw power was a crucial component of the arte d’armizare, and he carefully presented the movements within the system in order to maximize power and to minimize the time the body spent expended. In this way, targeted attacks could be delivered one after the other, without wasted recovery motions, as Döbringer had advised in 1389.

Imperative Principle of Control

Throughout each of the manuscripts, Fiore establishes personal security by establishing control over the opponent’s weapon. This is a major theme defining Fiore’s approach, but it must be discovered by following through Fiore’s series of techniques in order to establish the elements common to each. It is not articulated within the words—it is subtext—but it is a consistent element of Fiore’s solution set. This principle has several parts, which include the tactical imperative of securing control through the opponent’s primary weapon, which must be done by forcing him to sufficiently commit to the point of control, and finally, deciding upon the follow-on actions which will complete the fight quickly, before he can react or others can join the fray.

Woven within this tactical framework is the objective of seizing and maintaining the initiative. Over and over within the text, Fiore uses the terms subito and prestamente to reinforce this idea. I believe that Fiore’s use of these terms means more than the usual translations of them as “quickly;” in situ they seem to carry a sense of urgency, an imperative, which is why I have settled on identifying this collected principle the imperative principle of control and following-
The words *subito* and *prestamente* liberally pepper the text, emphasizing the need to move *now*, rather than later. This idea reflects a wider principle of the military art, recognized by Niccolò Machiavelli, Napoleon and modern U.S. joint doctrine.

In each of Fiore’s plays—the *zoghi*—Fiore’s first concern is to force a commitment *in order to establish control over the weapon*. This is how he seizes the initiative. He does not state who struck the first blow in any given *zogho*, and in fact, this is not important for the tactical framework he builds. In the first case—parallel with the German concept of the *vor* discussed in the last chapter—if the combatant himself moves first, then he has already seized the initiative because the opponent must respond to him. Momentarily, at least, he is in control of the action and has dictated that the opponent respond to him, rather than taking an original action of his own choosing. The combatant has opened the fight with a critical advantage. In the second case, if the opponent has struck first—equivalent to the German term *nach* discussed in the last chapter—then Fiore reduces the opponent’s options not by blocking the weapon, but by attacking directly into it. This pattern is evident in all of the *zoghi*, which generally take place following the establishment of this imperative of control.

Any attempt to seize a weapon results in a crossing of the weapons. This is the *incrosa* or *croce*, which is present at the start of all Fiore’s *zoghi*. In the grappling or *abrazare* section, the combatant presses the opponent with his own arm; the result is a crossing of the limbs. In the dagger section, the knife-arm is aggressively crossed; similarly for the sword in one and two hands, with the *lanza* or spear, and with the *azza* or poleaxe, or with the lance on horseback. These *incrosa* are depicted clearly in the text, and from the character of the *incrosa* will come Fiore’s solution set. The *incrosa* itself is achieved simply by attacking into the incoming weapon, sometimes into the teeth of the attack and trying to over-power it, as in the case of a *rebattendo*;
or to blend with it and redirect it, as in the case of the *redoppiando*.

Thus, the first imperative is to secure a commitment from the opponent so that his solution set will be reduced in size. If he is free to choose any action, or if he is likely to choose any action, then the combatant will find it far more difficult to predict and respond to the opponent’s actions. Restricting the opponent’s freedom of action is thus a critical element of the imperative of control.

Once the combatant has a *presa* or press against the primary weapon, he may then move onto how he will resolve the combat, because he has established a measure of control over the opponent’s weapon, which has increased the combatant’s safety and sharply reduced the opponent’s options. We see this tactical progression as consistently displayed in all weapon-forms, although it is unarticulated in the text.

However, the principle is illustrated in that each series of *zoghi* or plays begin with some kind of *incrosa*—thus, the important work has already been done in each of the plays, because the combatant has either struck first and sparked a response from the opponent, who usually covers himself with his weapon if he does not flee, or he has responded to the opponent and has defended himself with an attack into the opponent’s weapon in order to retrieve the initiative. In either case, the result is the *incrosa*. This tactical objective has eluded most students of Fiore’s work because it is not expressed within Fiore’s words. I have arrived at this conclusion using a functional technical analysis, and then validated it through extensive experimental archaeology with thousands of repetitions and variations.

In the dagger section, for example, the *incrosa* is defined through contact between the combatant’s arms.\(^{104}\) This may be simple contact, or it can be a *presa* or “grip.” In the sword

\(^{104}\) Getty mss. fol. 10v (m.36, 37) provide excellent examples.
section, because the swords are longer, the *incrosa* is sensibly made with the sword blade.\(^{105}\)

Similarly with the haft of the *azza* and *lanza*, on foot or mounted.\(^{106}\)

This approach is subtly different than the Liechtenauer method. As we saw in the last chapter, combatants following Liechtenauer were advised to seize the initiative by aggressively striking over and over with great strength, forcing the opponent to defend himself and removing his ability to attack in response.\(^{107}\) But the German system too observes that when the weapons are crossed, the fight is at a kind of pause, and the crossed state yields both information and an opportunity for either combatant to retake the initiative. In the German texts this is called *binden*, or binding.\(^{108}\)

Fiore’s solution also seeks to seize the initiative, but in his case the resolution will be settled immediately, using information gained through the *incrosa* to define a probable set of viable solutions. From this solution set, which is bounded by families of responses defined in the *cinque cose*—the “five things,” to be discussed later in this chapter—the combatant may more rapidly analyze the probabilities of success and choose accordingly.\(^{109}\) The beauty of the German and Italian models is that they reduce the decision time needed to arrive at a solution decision, giving an important advantage in *time*, cornerstone governor of any combat environment.

**Finishing, Following On (Time) and the Principle of Resolving Pressure/Position**

The contact resulting from the momentary crossing of the swords gives the combatant a sense of the opponent’s intentions by the pressure sensed through the weapons as well as their

\(^{105}\) Getty mss. fol. 25r (m.150), 25v (m.151), and 28r (m.172) provide examples both at the *zogho largo* and the *zogho stretto*.

\(^{106}\) Getty mss. fol. 33r (m.209) for the sword in armour, fol. 36v (m.233) shows this with the poleaxe, albeit after the axe has been subsequently driven to the ground with a *rebattendo*.

\(^{107}\) Hanko Döbringer, op. cit., fol. 25r.

\(^{108}\) Ibid.

\(^{109}\) This algorithmic decision tree concept will be discussed in greater detail in the final chapter.
relative positions. This *incrosa*, or *binden*, in the German, must be resolved. Fiore gives five methods for this, which I have come to call “following on” after the point of control. He gives his combatants a choice of five categorical responses, which include striking, disarming, binding, breaking or throwing. The idea of “following on” after the *incrosa* is first presented in the dagger section, *a far questo cinque cose in sempre sera: zoè tor la daga e ferir, romper li brazi e ligargli e metterlo in terra*, “Always do these five things; that is to say, disarming (turning) the dagger; wounding, breaking the arms and binding them, and putting him to the ground.”

In fact, a careful study of Fiore’s *zoghi* reveals that all of his plays are subsets or groups of the five basic ways to follow on (and finish he fight) outlined in the dagger section. There is a “control” point first, which isolates the weapon, be it an arm, a dagger, sword, spear, sword or lance; then the *zugadori* or players demonstrate one or more of these five “following” resolutions. Of course, counters and remedies to these counters are included, but the essential strategy is both coherent and consistent: First establish control and initiative by isolating and if possible, by securing the weapon. Second, select one or more of the *cinque cose* to resolve the conflict: strike, disarm, break, bind or throw.

Follow-on Selection, “Finishing,” *Finirsi*

The selection of an appropriate follow-on depends upon a number of factors, including the pressure and commitment of both opponents at the *incrosa* (or as I generalize it, the control point); the relative positions of the weapons in the cross, and the position of the combatants and

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110 At a more advanced level, this idea of *fühlen*, as the Germans expressed it, encompasses a great deal more than the physical analysis of pressure and position through blade contact. The combatant may bring all he knows about the opponent and the environment to bear on making his decision. Later Italian fencing terms this idea *sentimento di ferro*; I wonder whether this might not be something of what Fiore was expressing when he declared in his *Prologio* that he wanted to record what he knew “of steel.”

111 Fiore dei Liberi, Getty mss., op. cit., fol. 9v.
their limbs, both arms and legs. Because of the power principle noted above, an additional factor is the available power or stored energy available through each combatant’s body mechanics. In other words, does each combatant have their body sufficiently harnessed to make an effective blow? How much potential energy is available? Fiore does not present these factors in any distilled way within the text; they are woven semi-randomly through the counters and remedy-counters, but a careful and thorough study of them reveals that he will leave the assessment of these factors up to the combatant, who must creatively assess them and apply an effective solution based on the core principles offered in the text. This maximizes the flexibility of the system and its ability to be generalized with any hand shock weapons, from grappling through a sword, scimitar, or a modern U.S. Army M-4 wielded in hand-to-hand combat. Fiore uses the term *si finirsi*, “finishing.” Although he lays out these options in the dagger section, they are demonstrated consistently with all of the other weapons in the treatise, including the sword, spear, and poleaxe, on foot and on horseback, in and out of armour.

In addition, Fiore recognizes and seems to be perhaps the most powerful advocate for the preservation of combat flexibility. This is what I think of as the *Principle of Maneuver*. Unlike the German system, fluidity in the Italian system does not seem to be derived from movement of the feet, but rather from the “fast transient” movements from the *incrosa*. In the text, Fiore demonstrates a great many options from the cross, giving the student the widest possible menu of tactical choices from which to choose. In this way, freedom of maneuver and decision is preserved for the longest possible time.

**Disarming: Tor la daga, Tor di spada**

In his list, Fiore first offers the option of disarming, or “turning” the dagger to take it
from the opponent, tor la daga, literally “turning” the dagger. This option nicely extends the core principle of the imperative of control; once disarmed, the opponent is much less dangerous.

On the next folio, Fiore offers a depiction of four magistri, the first of whom carries a dagger upraised in his right hand, teasingly asking,

Perché io son porto [la] daga in mia mane dritta? Io la porto per mia arte ché lla ò ben meritada ché zaschun che me trarà di daga io glela torò di mano e cum quella lo saverò ben ferire, peroché lo pro e’l contra del tutto se finire.\textsuperscript{112}

Why do I carry a dagger in my right hand? I carry it because of my art, because I have won it each time you have come against me with it, and I have turned it from the hand and with it I well know how to wound; I know the counters and how to finish.

In the dagger section, we see Fiore offering the disarm in a large number of plays.

Focusing on the Getty manuscript, we find a disarm on the very first zogho offered with the dagger, on fol. 10v (m.36).\textsuperscript{113} We see it again on fols. 12v (m.53, 54), 15v (m.78), 18v (m.100, 103), and 38r (m.244, 245). With the sword, he uses it extensively, but not unless the blade has first been secured, which requires the close play of the zogho stretto, to be discussed below.

With the sword he shows it with his tor di spada plays, shown on fols. 30r and 30v (m.190, 191, 192, 193, and 194). He shows it in armour on fol. 33v (m.214), and with the poleaxe or azza on fol. 37r (m.238, 239), but he does not show it in the equestrian section, probably because the core problem in the mounted combat is to achieve an incrosa in the first place.

**Striking: Colpire and Ferire**

Striking—or literally, “wounding,”—is offered next. Whether or not a disarm has been achieved, once the control point or incrosa has been made, either combatant may follow-on and hopefully finish using a strike. Fiore offers a rich variety of options here—\textsuperscript{112}Ibid., fol. 10r.\textsuperscript{113}Ibid. The “m” notation refers to Massimo Malipiero’s useful numbering scheme presented in his facsimile transcription and interpretation.
with one’s own weapons (a fist, foot, dagger, sword, spear, baton or poleaxe), with a weapon taken from the opponent (whether or not he is still holding it), or with anything else within reach. Fiore does not offer a paragraph for striking, but he illustrates it in a considerable number of plays with all weapons. Just as the first choice in the follow-on menu was a disarm illustrated in the dagger section, the second option presented shows a strike made with a bare fist, once the opponent’s dagger arm has been secured, shown on fol. 10v (m.37). Another strike is shown on the same page, this time as a remedy to a counter, as the remedy-master brings a second hand to defeat the opponent’s effort at a bind/break (m.39). The same principle is shown against the next counter, on fol. 11r (m.41), and again on fol. 12r (m.48), again as a remedy-master, this time against a double-handed grip against the dagger arm. On the same folio, yet another remedy-master demonstrates how to use it to counter a cross-wrist cover (m.50), and in this case the master then moves quickly to a disarm (m.51). Once again against a figure four lock, on fol. 13v (m.60). When the combatant has a dagger of his own, the strike is again illustrated as the follow-on or finish to the first play, shown on fol. 16r (m.82), and on 16v (m.84), on fol. 18v (m.102).

In distance play with longer weapons, such as the sword, axe and spear, on foot and on horseback, the way the *colpo* or strike may made depends upon the position, pressure and potential energy in the respective weapons. Therefore, the tactical order is changed. Striking is presented *before* disarming. Fiore illustrates this idea chiefly in the order in which he presents the plays, but he does not write about it in the text. He offers only the very barest of written clue as to his intention, but there is considerably more encoded in the subtext, which is worth examining in detail, since it addresses the importance of subtext to understanding his method.

Fiore combined pressure and position, leaving the assessment of potential solutions up to the combatant. He uses a concept he introduces as the *tre volte* to resolve the pressure.
Frustratingly, he introduces the concept in a single sentence, leaving generations of future students to wonder at his meaning. However, I believe we have resolved his meaning through both kinesthetic analysis and through experimental archaeology. He first introduces the *tre volte* or “three turns” in a single paragraph that introduces the sword in two hands:

Noy semo doi guardie una si fatta che l’altra, e una è contraria de l’altra. E zaschuna altra guardia in l’arte una simile de l’altra si è contrario salvo le guardie che stano in punta zoé posta lunga e breve e meza porta di ferro che punta per punta la più lunga fa offesa innanzi. E zò che pò fare una pò far l’altra. E zaschuna guardia pò fare volta stabile e meza volta. Volta stabile si è che stando fermo pò’ zugar denunci e di dredo de una parte. Meza volta si è quando uno va intorno uno pe’ cum l’altro pe’ l’uno staga ferma e l’altro lo circondi. E pezò digo che la spada si ha tre movimenti zoé volta stabile, meza volta, e tutta volta. E queste guardie sono chiamate l’una e l’altra posta di donna. Anchora sono IV cose in l’arte zoé passare, tornare, accentare e dicrescare.114

We are two guards, one made opposite and countering the other. And likewise each of the other guards in the art has a counter save for the guards that stand in the thrust, such as poste longa, breve and meza porta di ferro, because in thrusting with the tip the longer offends first. And that which makes one can make the other. And each guard can make volta stabile and mezza volta. Volte stabile (stable turns) are those which stand firm, playing the one side and the other as one. Mezz volta are those in which one makes a passo forward or back, which enables him to play on one side or the other. Tutte volte are those in which one makes a turn (*intorno*), one foot in a circle (*circondi*) around the other, which stays still. **And therefore the sword has three movements called the volta stabile, mezza volta, and tutta volta.** And each guard [from which we play] is called posta di donna. Also likewise [there are] four in the art called passare, tornare, acrescare and dicresare.

Fiore gives details of the footwork, and then a single sentence discussing how there are also three *volte* or turns of the sword. But there is no further explanation. There is, however, a presentation just a few *fogli* later, when he presents the principle in the third play of the series for the sword in two hands.115 The solution depicted in the drawing is to strike on the same side as the guard, using a turn of the sword to redirect the weapon—if the guard is weak or imperfect in its cover. But in the text he writes that one cannot strike in this way, one may decide to strike on

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114 Fiore dei Liberi, Getty mss., op. cit., fol. 22r.
115 Fiore dei Liberi, Getty mss., op. cit., fol. 25v (m.153).
the other side. The first option represents a *volta stabile*, a turn that “stays firm” on the same side, while the second represents the second option, which “enables him to play on one side or the other.” This is also an example of Fiore’s tactical decision tree, which we’ll discuss in the next section. He further demonstrates striking with the blade as a preferred finish in the majority of plays, whether or not the opponent’s weapon has been secured, as on fol. 25r (m.151), 25v (m.154), 26r (m.157, 158), 26v (m.162, 163), and 27r (m.164, 166, 167). He shows a strike with the point on fols. 26v (m.160) and 27v (m.168, 169). He also uses the foot, as on fols. 25v (m.155) and 26r (m.159). Similar saturation is demonstrated in the *zogho stretto* section, and with all of the other long weapons. With longer weapons, Fiore’s preference is for striking as the finish, efficiently using the most potent weapon available.

Apart from the blade, Fiore uses the whole weapon. In the *zogho stretto*, or “close play,” we find attacks with the pommel on fol. 28r (m.174, 175), and possibly on 29r (m.180).

In the German system, this pressure through the blades was known as *fühlhen*, with the principle of “strength versus weakness,” and “weakness versus strength.” In other words, the combatant drives through an opponent’s guard that is weak, and goes around one that is strong. For Fiore, the principle is the same, but it is not articulated within the text, but it is presented in the order in which the plays are presented, as we’ll see when looking at the tactical decision tree in the next section.

**Binding: Ligare li brazi**

The imperative principle of control leads Fiore to favor, whenever possible, securing his opponent. The term he uses for this binding, *ligare*, means “to bind,” and it is related to the modern English word “ligament,” used to describe the soft tissue which binds the bones together.
at the joints. Fiore in fact uses the joints of the arm as a weapon, just as many Asian arts do today. Many of the joint-locks shown in Fiore’s work are very similar those in the Asian martial arts, and modern practitioners are often surprised at this, but it should be no surprise, as the human body has hardly changed appreciably since 1400. Fiore’s system seems to have a strong preference for securing the opponent’s arm, and the main target is the arming controlling the primary weapon. When the distance is far away, as in zogho largo, the more likely point at which to make a presa or grapple is the weapon itself, and Fiore shows this. When the distance closes, things become more difficult and the imperative of control becomes more acute, and securing a presa against the opponent’s arm becomes critical, because the dagger or fist represents only one possible weapon—the combatant must control the opponent’s body because of the vast number of secondary options available to the opponent at close range: the weapon itself, the off-hand, the head, or foot. Worse of all, a presa or grip of his own, which can result in the worst possible case, the combatant being drawn to the ground himself, where he might suffer significant injury as the ground strikes him or worse should the opponent have allies in the vicinity.

As before, Fiore introduces the idea in the dagger section through a magistro who, in this case, holds in his hands a key, for, as he explains:

Io son magistro de avrire e anche de serare zoè gli brazi. A chi contra mi vol fare yo lo metterò in grandi brige e stente, per modo che le ligadure e rotture sono depente. È perzòporto le chiave per insegna ché tal arte ben m’è degna.\textsuperscript{116}

I am the magistro who has the openings and closings, that is to say, the arms. Any who come against me will have great trouble. Watch closely how binding (ligadure) and breaks (rotture) are made. It is for this reason that I carry a key, representing the keys to this art.

Fiore here describes two steps, binding and breaking. The breaking step is discussed in the next section, but he introduces it here to say that the ligadure or binding is prerequisite to the

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., fol. 10r (m.34).
break itself. In fact, this is a “key” to the system, Fiore says, which is why the magistro illustrated carries a key in his hand.

In a bind, the combatant captures the opponent’s weapon. Fiore’s preference seems to have been for securing the opponent’s right arm, controlling his whole body through pressure on the joint. We see this in the very first play in the PD and Getty manuscripts, in the short abrazare or grappling section, where he uses the opponent’s arm to keep himself from becoming involved in a more difficult “embrace” or gamborella. Indeed, the whole of the abrazare section might be seen as avoiding an opponent who is intent on grappling or wrestling. Once engaged, Fiore several times notes the danger present in such situations and advises his combatants to drive their opponent’s to the ground or strike them in “perilous” places, such as in the eyes, the groin, or in pressure points at the neck, jaw or temples.117

In the dagger section, Fiore demonstrates a preference for the presa as a component of a finish, a useful prerequisite that extends control further and which enables breaks, throws, and safer strikes. In general, Fiore seems to intend that the ligadure are broken into three simple and logical categories: ligadure soprane, ligadure sottane, and ligadure mezzane, or “high” “middle” and “low” locks. For the most part, the locks are made against the elbow or shoulder, or some combination thereof.

The very first master of the dagger shows a simple presa against the opponent’s overhand dagger strike. This can be a simple incrosa or crossing of the arms, which comes first, or it can be extended into a grip or a figure four lock, as he later shows on fol. 13r (m.59). But Fiore introduces the formal ligadura in order in his third play of the dagger, where the combatant slides his arm through to secure a ligadura mezana, a “middle” lock, elbow to elbow, through

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117 Although Fiore does not mention that these points contain nerve clusters, modern pressure point tactics have expanded the idea considerably.
which he controls the opponent’s right arm. This is shown on fol. 10v (m.38), and the immediate
counter is shown on the very next play, fol. 10v (m.39). In this case, he shows how an alert
combatant (who thus becomes a remedy-master, by recognizing the potential in the play and
turning it against the attacker) can bring more leverage or stabilitàs to defeat the opponent’s
lock. If he acts quickly—subito or prestamente—he can bring a second hand to bear and turn the
lock against the opponent, locking him. This is in harmony with the German concepts of vor and
nach; the opponent started the lock in the vor or “before,” but the remedy master, starting in the
nach because the opponent acted first, countered quickly and secured the initiative—indes—thus
recapturing the vor and an important and perhaps decisive advantage for himself. Fiore himself
did not use these terms, but the harmony of solutions is strongly suggestive of a consensus on
principles of the martial arts of medieval Europe.

The use of these locks marks Fiore’s tactical preference and the locks pepper all of his
manuscripts. Again working through the Getty, we find ligadure soprane on fol. 11r (m.40), fol.
11v (m.47). The classic “figure four” ligadura soprana is shown for the first time on fol. 13r
(m.59), and idea of using it against itself on the next page, fol. 13v (m.60). It is shown also on
14v (m.69, 70).

Recalling from the above that Fiore shows the ligadura mezana first on fol. 10v (m.38),
we see the “arm bar” version of it shown on fol. 13v (m.63). He introduces the ligadure sottani
on fol. 11v (m.46, 47), 12r (m.48), 14r (m.64, 65, 66), fol. 16r (m.83), fol. 18r (m.98, 99). He
shows the same technical principle with the sword in two hands in the section on the zogho
stretto, fol. 29v (m.186, 187), in armour on fol. 29 (m.213, 214), and with the poleaxe on fol. 37r
(m.237).

Fiore also uses the weapon to make what are now known as triangle locks against the

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opponent’s wrist and forearm, as on 11v (m.44), 14r (m.67), and with the baton or *bastoncello* on fol. 8v (m.21). Occasionally, he simply traps an arm in order to set up another maneuver, such as a turn of the body or a throw, as on fol. 11r (m.42), 12r (m.50, 51). With the sword, if the distance is sufficient, as can sometimes be found with the sword in one hand, he traps the arm at the wrist in order to strike with his own weapon, such as on fol. 20v (m.115, 116, 117).

At *zogho largo* or “distance play,” it is difficult to capture the opponent’s arm, so Fiore instead captures the blade, which he shows starting in the section with the sword in two hands, fol. 25v (m. 154, 155), and 26v (m.161). In *zogho stretto*, or “close play,” more of the sword may be captured and finishing strikes more creatively applied, as on fol. 29r (m.183), and 29v (m.184).

In all of the cases above, the lock itself provides a method for increasing control and for enabling a greater menu of choice amongst the *cinque cose*, as would have been appropriate in different circumstances. It was prerequisite for the next of the “five things,” known as *rottura*.

**Breaking or Rotture**

One way to finish a fight was, as one of the “five things,” efficient, brutal and effective. Once a lock or *ligadura* had been made against the opponent’s arm, it could be turned past the point at which the ligaments could hold, “ruining” or breaking—*rottura*—the arm, as Fiore called it. Alternatively, a fast execution of a lock could either cause the opponent’s own body to cast itself violently to the ground in an effort to protect the joint, or the combatant himself could drive him to the ground, should the opponent lose his balance, something that is very easy to do with any of the three *ligadure* executed at combat speed. As before, Fiore introduces the concept in the dagger section, as the master gruesomely holds a pair of severed arms for the student to
examine. This is not to say that the arm was necessarily removed from the opponent, but it is perhaps better thought of as “taken” by the combatant, as it was “ruined” in place.

Per li brazzi rotti ch’io porto, io voglio dir mia arte: ché questa senza voler mentire che assay n’ó rotti e dislogadi in mia vita e chi contra mia arte se metterà voler fare, tal arte sempre io son per voler usare.\(^{118}\)

I carry these arms to show the truth of my art: I have broken and dislocated enough arms in my life, and I should I wish to, I can use this art against any who come against me.

Fiore does not show the gruesome results of the dislocations or breaking that can be found, but they are possible with any of the ligadure listed in the previous section, if the joint is moved quickly past its tolerance.

### Putting the Opponent on the Ground: Metterle in terra

There is no ground-fighting in Fiore, as there is in some of the German treatises.\(^{119}\) However, it appears last in Fiore’s list of five things. Although he provides no explanation for why it might fall in this order, I have observed from practice that throwing the opponent without a ligadura, while possible, often results in both combatants going to the ground. But Fiore does show throws in a good number of zoghi, and as before he introduces “putting the opponent to the ground” as the fourth master introducing the dagger:

Mo demanda voy perché io tegno questo homo sotto gli miei piedi: perché miglara n’o posti a tale partito per l’arte dello abrazare. E per vittoria io porto la palma in la man destra, peroché dello abrazare zamia non fo resta.\(^{120}\)

You ask me why there is a man beneath my feet? Because it is better to put them there according to the art of abrazare. And for victory I carry a palm in my right hand, because I never relent.

\(^{118}\) Ibid, fol. 10r (m.33).

\(^{119}\) Paulus Kal, op. cit., fols. 94r, 95v, 95r; Sigmund Ringeck, op. cit., fol. 70v-72r.

\(^{120}\) Fiore dei Liberi, Getty mss., op. cit., fol. 10r (m.35).
Nearly all of Fiore’s throwing techniques involve attacking the opponent’s sense of balance, his *stabilitàs*. Some are made from the ligadure, as mentioned above. Many others are what I think of as “counter-balancing” throws, where the combatant’s objective is to press the upper body backward while simultaneously pulling the lower body forward. This must be done fast and violently, and it can be helped by using the knees, neck and leverage advantages provided by the available weapons.

As with the other *cinque cose*, Fiore introduces the concept of “putting him to the earth” in the dagger section, showing one for the first time on the second leaf of the dagger plays, fol. 11r (m.42). Here, the scholar from the first play steps through the opponent and anchors his lower body by stepping behind the right leg, simultaneously driving him backward with his left arm at the neck. The result is brutal and fast. But the standard form for a Fiorean throw is presented first with the dagger on the next page, fol. 12v (m.55), probably because the throws were all presented in the *abrazare* section, on fols. 6v (m.7), 7r (m.11) and with the baton on fol. 8v (m.22).

An unusual throw for Fiore is the shoulder dislocation/hip throw depicted on fol. 12r (m.51), reminiscent of similar throws the author has done in Hapkido. It is shown again on fol. 15r (m.72).

Although relatively few throws are depicted or mentioned, they are possible from a great many of the control positions shown throughout the text. The theme is continued into the equestrian section, where a primary objective is to dismount the opponent, and the same principles are presented again, this time taking into account the unique dynamics of an armoured man who begins the combat secure in the saddle.
The Five Things

Fiore’s *cinque cose* represent branches of his tactical decision tree which are possible once a degree of control has been achieved over the opponent’s primary weapon. Such things must be done quickly, in order to maintain the initiative, but they may also be used in sequence or in creative combinations, as appropriate to the circumstances. For example, once a *ligadura sottana* is achieved, with the opponent’s arm driven behind his back, he may easily be disarmed, struck, driven to the ground, or the arm might be broken. Or he may simply be held, should further violence be inappropriate. All of these five things, while present in the German system, are considered differently within the Liechtenauer tradition. Nonetheless, all are present. This represents, as mentioned above, a consensus on the core concepts governing the martial arts of medieval Europe.

The above principles have articulated the “what” and “how” aspects of the *arte d’armizare* resulting from a blend of textual analysis, the application of kinesthetic principles, and experimental archaeology. Fiore expressed many of the above concepts within the text itself, or within the illustrations. However, the following principle—the principle of distance—may only be understood through a thorough examination of the work’s subtext and is much harder to identify. This principle is expressed within the text in the order that the plays are presented, and it articulates, by order of presentation rather than through explanation, the core element of the system’s tactical decision tree.¹²¹ This principle takes the above “what” and “how” elements and adds the most important component: the “when.”

For Fiore, the tactical tree begins at the widest possible distance. Presumably, this was because one can fire first at the widest distance, and several times, Fiore writes, “he who has the

¹²¹ I have used the term “tactical decision tree” to describe the probability-based decision-making guidelines that form the basis of the medieval martial arts systems. I believe this tool can be a useful comparative method, not only for historical studies, but also for any comparison of tactical systems.
longest point will offend first.\footnote{122 Fiore dei Liberi, \textit{Fior di Battaglia}, Getty mss., op. cit., fol. 26v (m.160).} In the Getty, the \textit{poste} are presented first, followed by a set of plays Fiore calls the \textit{zogho largo}, literally the “wide” or “large” plays, defined by the distance between the combatants. This is the distance at which the blade of the weapon can be profitably brought to bear using a single step. This section is contained in seven leaves, the last two of which transition to the next section, the \textit{zogho stretto}, or “close plays” section. The principles of the \textit{zogho stretto} are presented, not surprisingly, in the \textit{abrazare} and dagger sections, which are understandably dominated by conflict that takes place at these instances. In the sections where the weapons are longer, the \textit{zogho largo} is presented first. Notably, the \textit{zogho largo} is presented first with the sword in two hands, where the distance is significantly wider than it would be with the unarmed, dagger or sword in one hand sections. It makes perfect tactical sense.

Even within the \textit{zogho largo} section itself, the plays done at that distance are further divided and are presented in an order that makes good tactical sense. First, the case is presented where the swords are just barely crossed at the tips. Second, the more usual case is presented where the swords are crossed—\textit{incrosa}—at at the middle. The distance has closed slightly here, but the combatants remain at \textit{zogho largo}. From this point, Fiore presents a set of options.

In the first play of the \textit{zogho largo}, as I discussed above, presents the most common resolution for an \textit{incrosa} at the middle of the swords, which would use either the \textit{volta stabile} if the opponent’s cover is imperfect, or the combatant could go around if the cover is stronger by position, strength or both, using a \textit{mezza volta}. He goes around if the cover is strong, or redirects and stays on the same side.

But if there is indecision at the \textit{incrosa}, what then? Fiore presents this option next in the next two plates. Here, because the weapons are both static, the combatant uses a \textit{presa}, a grip, to
capture the opponent’s weapon. From here, chooses from one or more of the *cinque cose*; in this instance, he illustrates a low kick, since both hands are busy.

The next case is if the *incrosa* results from an over-powered strike, what Fiore poetically calls the *colpo di villano*, or “villain’s strike.” In this case, Fiore presents the *tutta volta*, a full turn, which sloughs the power of the strike and redirects it slightly, returning with great power drawn from the opponent’s blow. So at this point, he has presented the cases for the usual cross with normal pressure, the case that the swords have paused or are firmly bound, and the case where the opponent’s strike is so powerful that it would overwhelm the combatant’s sword. The rest of the manuscript is organized similarly. This is subtext, encoded in the order in which the plays are presented and it can be very difficult to read without the experience conveyed by experimenting with the techniques and attempting to learn *why* they were presented in the order offered in the original text.

For all its cohesion, the tactical decision tree created by Fiore was very likely unique to Fiore. It is very different in the surviving German works. But the building blocks he used to build it were likely principles well understood by combatants throughout Europe. A close examination of Fiore’s work reveals principles very similar to those explored in the Hanko Döbringer treatise of 1389 in the previous chapter, and those in turn were similar if not based upon the same principles shown in the earliest known fighting treatise, I.33, explored in chapter 3. In the three treatises, we see a remarkable continuity of principle, not necessarily the result of a lineage, but rather all three recognize and apply principles of kinesthetic efficiency to the military technology of the period. These principles are, understandably, understood through cultural lenses which provide meaning and define appropriate use of the violence.
CHAPTER 5

THE MEDIEVAL MEANING OF “L’ARTE”: ART AND MEMORY

It holds true both of both the liberal and mechanical arts, and of any other arts which may exist but whereof we have not yet heard mention, that art is sterile without use, and use is blundering without art.

—John of Salisbury

Fiore called his system of combat, *arte d’armizare*, literally, “The Art of the Use of Arms.”¹ The fourteenth century German master-at-arms, Johannes Liechtenauer, termed his practice *kunst des fechten*, literally the “Art of Fighting.”² I posit that the use of the term “Art” was not coincidental between these two early masters, and, that while many fencing historians have written off early European fighting traditions as “rough and untutored,”³ the masters careful selection of the terms *arte* or *kunst* describes instead a systematic approach to the use of hand weapons. They thought of their art not as “rough and untutored,” but as systematic and refined; an Art that sought a specific aim through understanding and application of combat principles.

This chapter looks at the classical conceptions of art as articulated by those most influential to medieval semantics; Aristotle, Plato, Cicero and Quintilian, and how these conceptions were communicated through the commentaries of al-Fārābī, Averroes, Aquinas, and John of Salisbury. Next, I look at the methods through which formal knowledge was passed during the late Middle Ages in the form of memory palaces.

**Aristotle and Arte**

Mary J. Carruthers, writing on medieval pedagogy in *The Book of Memory*, asserted that,

¹ Fiore dei Liberi, Getty Codex Ludwig XV 13, hereafter simply, “Getty,” fol. 1r. It is generally accepted by students of Fiore’s work that the Getty is the most complete of Fiore’s manuscripts. However, the term *arte* recurs in all known versions, which likely date from 1409-1420.

² The earliest known version of Liechtenauer’s verse is found in the 1389 *hausbüch* attributed to Hanko Döbringer, *Hausbüch*, Manuscript HS 3227a, Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg, 1389.

“A proper art requires general principles and a system which can apply to a variety of circumstances…”\(^4\) In the same work, she hinted that this idea came through Aristotle, “All sciences, indeed, were matters of practice [\textit{in uso}] before they became matters of art [\textit{in arte}]…what was vague and subject to caprice…[was] brought into order by definite rules and precepts.”\(^5\) Later, she added, “…an art is a set of precepts deduced from many experiences, which in turn result from many repeated memories.”\(^6\) Ms. Carruthers did not attempt, nor need to attempt, to add depth to her definition, but such an exposition will be useful here. As with so much in the Middle Ages, it is best perhaps to begin with The Philosopher himself.

Born in 384 B.C. and soon moving to study with Plato, Aristotle’s ideas had an undeniable influence on philosophical and pedagogical thought, in particular the gradual evolution of systematic empiricism and of the practical over the theoretical. Writing some 500 works, amounting to perhaps 6,000 modern pages, only one-third survive. Following Aristotle’s death in 310 B.C., his works were gathered at Alexandria, possibly by his heir Theophrastus, who may have hidden them in a cave.\(^7\) Then, approximately two hundred years later, the present surviving corpus of works (with various errors and inclusions wrongly attributed to him), was produced in Rome by Andronicus. Most modern editions are based on this Roman collection.

Aristotelian thought broke with the Platonic fixation on theory and instead emphasized empiricism and perception as the primary vehicles towards real, practical knowledge. As we know from the gradual adoption of the empirical method during the twelfth and thirteenth

\(^5\) See Aristotle \textit{Didascalicon}, 1,2; John of Salisbury, \textit{Metalogicon}, cited by Carruthers on p. 42 (note page 300).
\(^6\) Ibid, p. 42.
\(^7\) This account is based for the most part on Jonathan Barnes’ \textit{The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle}, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. Barnes gives good bibliographical support for his arguments and provides an admirable and accessible introduction to studies on Aristotle, albeit from the philosopher’s point of view.
centuries—particularly through such prominent thinkers as John of Salisbury and Abelard—Aristotle was profoundly influential. Not only did his conceptions survive in theological writings, such as the commentaries of Thomas Aquinas, John of Salisbury and the aforesaid Abelard, just to note the most well-known, but they also seem to have formed the foundation for much of the Humanist ideal, which emphasized the central place of man in his universe, and which powerfully valued observation and empirical knowledge in addition to seeking human perfection in this lifetime.

While Aristotle’s works on memory, logic, and rhetoric are all useful, his conceptions concerning art are expressed with great clarity in Metaphysics 1-15. He begins with a useful organization for the conception of knowledge, writing that there are five kinds of knowledge, arranged from lowest to highest: sensation, memory, experience, art, and ultimately, science.

Sensation, he declared, is common to all animals; it is the mark of animal life. In some animals—including man—higher perception leads to memory of past sensations. Aristotle drew a powerful connection between the strength of a man’s memory and the force of intellect that allows a man to acquire knowledge. Uniquely, man has the capacity to organize similar memories into a useful construct known as experience. Experience organized into predictable patterns encompasses art, while science deals with absolute truth and reality.

Sensation, especially visual sensation, “makes us know and brings to light many

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differences between things.”\textsuperscript{10} It is the lowest rung of the pyramid of knowledge erected by Aristotle, because it may be enjoyed not only when useful—when bringing knowledge—but also for itself. Sensation is a kind of joy. But by itself sensation does not convey great knowledge, but with the next level of knowledge, memory, “the former [animals with memory] are more intelligent than the latter [those without memory], because they can be taught,”\textsuperscript{11} unlike some animals, such as the bee, which sense but which does not learn because it has no memory.

It is the ability to be taught that, for Aristotle, separates those having a memory from those who do not. Aristotle wrote about memory more fully in his book \textit{On Memory}, where he associates it with intelligence and distinguishes between the two main types, recollection and remembering. He wrote that, “memory is…a state or affection [of perception or conception] conditioned by the lapse of time.”\textsuperscript{12} Writing further, “only those animals who perceive time remember.”\textsuperscript{13} And he goes on to link memory as an essential component of imagination and creativity, usefully adding, “mnemonic exercises aim at preserving one’s memory of something by repeatedly reminding him of it; which implies nothing else than the frequent contemplation of something as a likeness as if it were a likeness.”\textsuperscript{14} Memory is the stored of sensory activity within the “organ” of the brain, while recollection is the retrieval of stored memory. Aristotle appears to classify both within the knowledge of memory. This idea of mnemonics plays a crucial role in medieval pedagogical systems, a point I will expand upon later.

\textit{Experience} comes from the repetition of similar memories into an organization which collects related sensory and memorial activity and discards those elements which do not fit,

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, 449.24-5.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid, 449.29-30.
“Animals other than man live by appearances and memories, and have but little connected experience, but the human race lives by experience and reasoning.”15 In short, man finds patterns in his life and stores these patterns as experience. They are also generalizations of observations that allow man to act without consideration of each particular in every circumstance, thus freeing him from the bondage of mere animal senses, “And from memory experience is produced in men; for many memories of the same thing produce finally the capacity for a single experience.”16 Experience makes one an individual, rather than a part of a larger collective and is a unique and important part of his identity. This idea, too, has a compelling part to play in establishing the importance of the role of the individual in Western culture. And, the idea of experience as a uniquely human categorization of repeated observations largely explains how the majority of combatants learned the art of combat through the “simulacra” of war, the medieval tournament.

Experiential knowledge is, however, limited because the view it provides about reality is not based on the causes of events. Rather, it is based upon the aggregated perceptions of particulars. This is the distinction, for Aristotle, between a skilled craftsman and a master artist.17 A “mere” craftsman skillfully executes his craft based on his experience, without necessarily knowing the underlying reasons for why he obtains the results he does. His experiential knowledge is well-honed, and, like the artist, driven for a practical, useful end. But that experience is uniquely individual and is not based on a deeper understanding of causes.

Art is the further generalization of experience into categories that can usefully govern

15 Ibid, 980.25.
16 Ibid, 981.1.
17 I have always thought of an art as distinct from a craft by the intention to communicate beyond the craft itself, and greater art communicates to an audience at greater distance from the original art’s context. Thus, great art should speak to anyone, while lesser art may communicate only to those knowledgeable about the art’s original context, as in modern and most post-modern art. Aristotle’s conception of art is interesting, and challenging.
action. He writes that an art is found, “when from many mental impressions arising from experience a single universal conception is formed about their common properties.”\(^{18}\) Art is about bringing together experience into systems of concept and action that can govern action, “but to know that it is serviceable in all like cases under one kind is characteristic of Art.”\(^{19}\)

Further elaborating on the distinction between the craftsman and the artist introduced above, like a craftsman, the artist acts with specific skills with specific and useful ends in mind; but unlike the craftsman, he acts with knowledge of the causes of events, of what he does. He writes, “Art is produced when, from many notions of experience, a single universal judgment is formed with regard to like objects.”\(^{20}\)

With great subtlety, Aristotle discusses the curious and apparent superiority of experiential knowledge over artistic understanding, and pointed to the distinction between the two as between knowledge of particulars and universals:

It would seem that for practical purposes experience is in no way inferior to art; indeed we see men of experience succeeding more than those who have theory without experience. The reason for this is that experience is the knowledge of particulars, but art of universals; and actions and the effects produced are all concerned with the particular.\(^{21}\)

And, “…if a man has theory without experience, but does not know the particulars concerned in it, he will often fail…”\(^{22}\) But,

…this is because the former [artists] know the cause, whereas the latter do not. For the experienced know the fact, but not the wherefore; but the artists know the wherefore but not the cause. For the same reason we consider that the master craftsman in every profession are more estimable and know more and are wiser than the artisans, [who] like certain inanimate objects, do things without knowing (for instance, fire burns), while master craftsmen are superior in wisdom not because they can do things, but because they possess a theory and know the causes.\(^{23}\)

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\(^{18}\) Ibid, 981.1.
\(^{19}\) Ibid.
\(^{20}\) Ibid.
\(^{21}\) Ibid, 981a.15
\(^{22}\) Ibid, p. 1553.
\(^{23}\) Ibid, 981a.25-30.
This is the knowledge earned by mere repetition; it is a mechanical mode of operation, displaying skill “from habit and association,” rather than from the mind.\(^{24}\) It is essentially irrational, because it doesn’t actively use judgment. Contrast this with art, which applies a systematic approach gleaned from knowledge of underlying principles to achieve a result. Fundamentally, a knowledge of art is critical to teaching, “And in general it is a sign of a man who knows, that he can teach, and therefore we think art more truly knowledge than experience, because artists can teach, while men of mere experience cannot.”\(^{25}\)

*Science* is the knowledge about absolute truth and reality.\(^{26}\) Philosophy is part of this kind of absolute truth, and hence the highest form of knowledge. Science applies, however, only to those things that can be known absolutely, and with certainty. Arts, by contrast, distill principles of causality and attempt to achieve a practical end, whereas the end of a science is knowledge itself.

Finally, Aristotle goes on to discuss wisdom, which is the knowledge of first principles. It is, “the most finished form of knowledge”\(^{27}\) “Wisdom (metaphysics) is concerned with the primary causes and principles, so that, as has already been stated, the man of experience is held as wiser than the mere possessors of any power or sensation, the artisan than the man of experience, the master craftsman than the artisan. Thus it is clear that wisdom is knowledge of certain principles and causes. Furthermore, wisdom is the association of outcome with actions or ideas with the good.

And so Aristotle’s pyramid of knowledge rests upon the foundation of the senses, which in some animals (including man) are stored as memory (memory and recollection), and which


\(^{25}\) Ibid, 981.5-9.

\(^{26}\) Ibid, 1.11-12.

\(^{27}\) Ibid, 1141.18.
may be collected into experiences. These experiences may be further categorized into single experiences (knowledge of particulars), which yields a measure of knowledge. This knowledge may be practical (gained through experience), but will be stronger and higher if it rests upon understanding, or Art, which is an attempt to employ causation in order to achieve a particular end. Atop the pyramid is science, which seeks absolute truth for its own sake, rather than for practice. Finally, above the whole structure lies wisdom, which rests upon a knowledge of first principles and particulars, all harnessed to achieve a good end.

Plato also discussed Art in a similar way:

What I said was, if I remember right, that cookery seems to me to be no art at all, but a mere empirical habit; medicine an art, meaning that the one, that is medicine, has inquired into the nature of that which it treats and the causes of what it does, and can give an account of each of them: but the other rests upon the pursuit of the pleasure unscientifically, without having bestowed any consideration upon either the nature of the cause of pleasure, and proceeds in a manner absolutely irrational, as one may say, without the smallest calculation, a mere knack and routine, simply retaining the collection of what usually happens, by which you know in fact she provides all her pleasures.28

For Plato, we see that Art once again requires certain knowledge of causes and governing principles. But in making such an assertion about cooking, one wonders if after this comparison he was ever again served a good meal.

Marcus Fabius Quintilianus, commonly known as simply as Quintilian, was a rhetorician whose influence would resonate in the classical education of medieval Europe, was born about 35 A.D. and by 68 A.D. had sufficient fame that he was called to Rome to set up the first public school. Quintilian demonstrates continuity of Aristotle’s conception; in his *Institutio Oratoria*, he wrote of an art as, “a system of uniform conceptions drilled, i.e., brought to work, together with one common end; that being something serviceable to human life and happiness.”29 It was, in

Quintilian’s words, “a faculty attaining its end by a systematic method.”

And finally, Cicero seems to have been in agreement. In the *de Oratore*, chapter forty-seven, 187.8, a discussion that explains how the orator should reduce a thing to rules and systems, that is, he calls it, an Art. This is exactly in accord with Plato, Aristotle, and Quintilian. One solid piece of evidence for Cicero’s influence in Scholastic thought can be traced through John of Salisbury, who, writing in 1159, cited him directly with respect to the idea of “precepts accompanied by practice”:

For as Cicero says, it is very easy to lay down precepts for everything, but it is a task of the utmost difficulty to put them successfully into practice in specific cases. He made this observation with reference to the art of speaking, in the precepts of eloquence which he wrote and addressed to Herennius, saying that the art was quite useless and ineffective without practice and training; but I think the statement may be extended to all the arts, in so far as they are not reinforced by practice and training; to the extent even, that if you dissociate the art and the practice, the practice is more useful without the art than art which is not accompanied by practical mastery.

Cicero’s influence throughout the middle ages is hardly in doubt; Harry Caplan demonstrated this in *Of Eloquence*, noting the plethora of surviving iconographic presentations of rhetoric, presented as a woman variously wielding a sword and shield or a scroll, tablet and stylus. Almost always, Cicero is depicted at her feet, underscoring the importance of rhetoric in the schema of the liberal arts. Certainly *de Oratore* was well known amongst educators during the course of the middle ages.

Strikingly, the classical authorities seem to have been for the most part in agreement on

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30 Quintilian II.17.
31 John of Salisbury, *Politicraticus*, Book VI, Chapter IX. The quotation is drawn from the English translation by John Dickenson, *The Statesman’s Book of John of Salisbury: Being the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Books, and Selections from the Seventh and Eighth Books, of the Polticraticus*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978, pp. 241-2. The Dickenson translation, and the Milestones of Thought abridgment by Murray E. Markland, suffers from modernization in some of the English words chosen. For example, in places the term *ars militari* is translated “military science,” which confuses the Aristotelian uses of Arts and Sciences with which Salisbury was doubtless familiar. Since the overall translation is excellent, I will add my own translation edits in the text with brackets [], with the original term used by Dickenson appearing in the footnote.
the basic definition of what constitutes an Art, which may be said to have been a systematic approach to reaching a goal based on an understanding of governing causes or principles. An art is flexible, because it deals with probabilities and potentialities, but it is governed by core principles which may be known and employed in order to reduce the variability of outcome. While it may have been a point of philosophical debate as to whether the Art of Rhetoric was indeed an Art, a great many other facets of human endeavor could be rationalized and optimized by knowing the governing causes. Art was deep knowledge harnessed in the service of endeavor, while science was the abstract search for truth.

As compared to experiential knowledge, it is important to keep in mind that experience conveys, according to Aristotle, knowledge of particulars; in practical endeavors, specific knowledge of the apparent particulars may suggest the superior position of experience over theory, and indeed the fourteenth century priest and commentator on Johannes Liechtenauer, Hanko Döbringer, makes precisely this point on fol. 15r:

One must use all the senses and pay close attention to the Art, practicing it often in [ludic] play. This will make it ready for you when you fight faster and in earnest, because Practice is better than Art; your Practice may very well be useful without Art, but your Art is useless without Practice.33

However, when the experiential knowledge of particulars is married to the theoretical knowledge of causality and governing principles, the result can only have been thought of as clearly superior.

These ideas about Art may have been in currency even before the rediscovery Aristotle—as might be suggested by the broad agreement on the topic amongst classical authors. But very little “practical” writing on Art seems to have survived from the fall of Rome until Aristotle’s works were commented upon by two Arab sources; Alfarābī in the ninth century and Averroes in

33 Hanko Döbringer, Hausbüch, 1389, fol. 15r.
the thirteenth. Through this tradition, Thomas Aquinas became familiar with Aristotle, and through Aquinas, the much wider audience of Christian Europe where all three of our authors—one anonymous, plus Fiore dei Liberi and Hanko Döbringer—may have encountered them. Regardless of whether the ideas were in currency as a result of Aristotle or not, the popularity of Aristotelian ideas suggests that his conception reflected the larger understanding of the term Art amongst literate people of the later middle ages and Renaissance.

Transmission via Arabic Texts

Through a tortuous route Aristotle’s ideas came again to the knowledge of Western Europe. Aristotle’s texts all but vanished in the sixth century, when Justinian ordered the Athens school closed in 529. Curiously, Boethius, who died in 525, must have had access to many of the works, since he proclaimed his intention of translating all of both Aristotle and Plato, in the process demonstrating the fundamental harmony between them. Boethius did translate a few of the works into Latin, including *Categoria*, *De Interpretatione*, and the *Prior Analytics*, but for the most part these efforts seemed to have had very little impact.

On the other side of the Mediterranean, however, a continuing interest in Aristotelian ideas continued, centering on the establishment of a school centered around the great library at Alexandria. The school and library survived until the burning of that quarter of the city in 272 A.D. Others were added by Olympiodorus, Alexander of Aphrodisias, and Porphyry. Other schools in this tradition were found at Edessa, Constantinople, and Antioch; the Mousaion school in fact moved to Antioch when forced to close. In the tenth century, the school moved again, this

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time to Baghdad, where the corpus of Aristotle’s works survived and helped to feed the
philosophic and scientific movements within the Islamic world.

By the sixth century many of Aristotle’s works had been translated into Syriac. It was
these which were eventually used to bring the works into Arabic, and this tradition was enriched
by the development of commentaries and other investigations, eventually finding its way into
Spain with the spread of Islam. In Spain, the works were translated from Arabic into Hebrew and
finally into Latin during the twelfth century. These were made by al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna),
and in the thirteenth century, by Ibn Rushd (Averroes). Although the conquest and capture of
Constantinople during the fourth crusade in 1204 yielded many important texts, the most
complete versions were made available not from the libraries in Constantinople, but from the
Iberian / Arabic sources. From there, European scholastics such as John of Salisbury, Thomas
Aquinas, and Albertus Magnus studied and then broadcasted the ideas in the movement that
became known as Scholasticism.

Like Boethius, al-Fārābī attempted to synthesize and harmonize the pagan philosophers,
and then to place the works within the context of Islamic thought (as Boethius would presumably
have done within the context of Christian theology). Al-Fārābī (870-950) was highly influential
within Islamic philosophical circles, eventually earning the title, “second master,” the “first
master” being none other than Aristotle himself. That al-Fārābī was influential is even more
impressive when one considers that, at the time, the rationality of the classical masters met stern
opposition from the authority of scriptural texts, particularly with respect to the dominant belief
in the superiority of divine law as set forth by the Prophet. This reflex against classical
rationality commanded not only Christian education, but also Judaic and Islamic. Against this
backdrop, al-Fārābī’s championing of classical rationalism is even more striking.
What al-Fārābī achieved is the smooth synthesis he desired, which helped to weave Aristotle’s method into the fabric of Islamic thought. In this, his study of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* was of particular importance:

…our defective natural science, for which we do not possess metaphysical science, could be made more ‘perfect’ once one understood, as a direct consequence of studying Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, that “the understanding of the causes of visible things, which the soul desired, is more human than the knowledge that was construed to be the necessary knowledge.”

Through Aristotle’s work, and the *Metaphysics* in particular, one could learn about the visible world, while scriptural sources could remain authoritative on the invisible or spiritual one.

Al-Fārābī’s work is broken into three parts. The first deals with the book’s main theme, the attainment of happiness through different kinds of virtue. The second summarizes Platonic philosophy, while the third does the same for Aristotelian. In the first, he claims that there are four areas of interest into which human endeavor may be divided, four kinds of virtue: theoretical, deliberative, moral and finally, practical arts. Reading al-Fārābī’s work, it is clear that the “second master” was not nearly a courtly recognition; his text is flowing and precise, and reminiscent of Aristotle’s work. In the first book, he makes a strong case for the importance of scientific, rational knowledge based on knowing the what, how and why of a thing. He lays out both genus and species divisions, and then signals the importance of this kind of knowledge:

…it will become evident concomitantly that these rational principles are not mere causes by which man attains the perfection for which he is made. Moreover, he will know that these principles also supply many other things to natural beings other than those supplied by nature. Indeed man arrives at the ultimate perfection (whereby he attains that which renders him truly substantial) only when he labors with these principles towards achieving his perfection.

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37 Ibid, p. 23.
Later in the text, al-Fārābī clearly lays out his thoughts about art and does so using an interesting military analogy, “…its end can only be fulfilled by making use of the functions of the other arts in its class. For instance, the art of commanding armies is such that its purpose can only be achieved by making use of the functions of the particular arts of warfare.”38 Here we see that the Art of warfare, as al-Fārābī uses it, suggests underlying principles that govern the activity and the potential causes of success or failure. Further on, he lays out his interpretation of Aristotle’s philosophy as a whole, which creates a hierarchy of knowledge:

Aristotle sees the perfection of man as Plato sees it…he saw four things that everyone pursues from the outset…1) the soundness of the human body, 2) the soundness of the senses, 3) the kind of knowledge that is useful and necessary [Aristotle’s memory, experience and Art], and 4) the kind of labor that is necessary and useful [the application of Art and experience].39

Broadly, he articulates but rejects Aristotle’s categorization into two types, the practical and the theoretical. For al-Fārābī, they are one and the same; the elimination of the distinction is the mechanism by which he marries to two philosophies together. Al-Fārābī’s importance to our discussion lies in his influence throughout the Islamic world, which led directly to the spread of such ideas to the Iberian Peninsula.

The most directly influential Arabic commentator to the Scholastics was Ibn Rushd, more commonly known as Averroes. Averroes commented on a great number of Aristotle’s works, and there is evidence within the writings of both Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas that they had direct access to Averroes commentaries.

In his commentaries on the Categoría and De Interpretatione, Averroes treats Aristotle’s logical method in some detail, focusing on the methods of argument and the logical organization of worldly things. Unlike al-Fārābī, there is no intent to synthesize the philosophies

38 Ibid, p. 32.
of Plato and Aristotle, and he adopted the Aristotelian worldview wholesale. In addition, al-
Fārābī paraphrased and summarized Aristotle’s work, whereas Averroes seems to have included
chunks of translated text followed by literal commentary (a lectio); for this technique he is
known as “the Commentator.”

Scholastic Adoption

The Clerk ther was of Oxford also,
That unto logyk hadde longe ygo,
As leene was his hors as a rake,
And he nas nat right fat, I undertake,
But looked holwe, and therto sobrely,
Ful thredbare was his overste courtepy,
For he hadde geten hym yet no benefice,
Ne was so worldly for to have office.
For him was levere have at his beddes heed
Twenty bookes, clad in blak or reed,
Of Aristotle and his philosophie…

As Chaucer observed, even the poor clerk, clad in a threadbare robe, too unimportant to
receive a benefice, was profoundly guided by Aristotelian philosophy. Transmitted through
Boethius and through the Arab commentators, Aristotle’s conceptions guided the development of
Scholasticism and, to an extent, to the Humanist movement that followed.

Thomas Aquinas, writing between 1271 and 1272, refers directly to both Avicenna and
Averroes in his commentaries on the *Metaphysics*. At a number of points (for example, nn.
556-8 and 894), he disagrees with the commentators, and infuses his own commentary which
refutes that which he found in the Arabic. At other points, (as in 766-69), he includes their
viewpoints where he thinks something of value is added.

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Aquinas’ influence to the Scholastic movement, and through it to the larger corpus of education within Christendom, is hard to overstate. Fortunately, there exists in English a high-quality translation of Aquinas’ commentaries on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, translated by John P. Rowan. In this commentary, he clearly conveys the idea of Arte drawn directly from the text when he writes,

He says that men of science and art come from experience, and he proves this on the authority of Polus, who says that, ‘Experience causes art and inexperience luck.’ For when an inexperienced person acts correctly, this happens by chance. Furthermore, the way which art arises from experience arises from memory. For just as one experiential cognition comes from many memories of a thing, so does one universal judgment about all similar things come from the apprehension of many experiences. Hence art has this [unified view] more than experience, because experience is concerned only with singulars, whereas art has to do with universals.42

But further, he makes a distinction that appears at first glance to stand Aristotle on his head:

He says then that in practical matters experience seems to differ in no way from art; for when it comes to acting, the difference between experience and art, which is the difference between the universal and the singular disappears, because art operates with reference to singulars just as experience does.43

Later, he temporizes, “But even though art and experience do not differ in the way in which they act, because both act on singular things, nevertheless they differ in the effectiveness of their action.”44 Aquinas is not above correcting Aristotle, bringing his own shrewd analytical abilities to bear.

Aquinas goes to considerable lengths to make comments about how art and science are superior to experience, as might be expected in a Scholastic. He has a very interesting passage relating to building, “The first part of this proof comes from the fact that architects, or master artists, know the causes of things that are done. In order to understand this we must note that

42 Ibid, p. 8, section 19.
44 Ibid.
architect means chief artist, from *techne* meaning chief, and *archos*, meaning art.\(^{45}\) The passage goes on to illuminate the role of carpenters in a similar fashion.

Overall, Aquinas brings together Aristotle’s thoughts and lays them alongside the translation he provides. This critically useful feat not only brought Aristotle into the grasp of Christian commentators, and through them into the educational mainstream, but also collated his views and set them within the Christian context, much as al-Fārābī and Averroes had done within the Islamic world.

*John of Salisbury*

John of Salisbury (\textasciitilde{}1115-1180), a pre-eminent Scholastic, is best-known for his political theory, expressed in the *Policraticus*.\(^{46}\) But he should perhaps be even better known for his pedagogical influence on medieval education, expressed in his *Metalogicon*.\(^{47}\) Together with the *Policraticus*, the *Metalogicon* was sent to Thomas Beckett, which survive and remain in Corpus Christi College at Cambridge, MS Cod. 46, fols. 184-239.\(^{48}\) So influential was the text that Charles Sears Baldwin referred to it as “the cardinal treatise of medieval pedagogy.”\(^{49}\) Through his landmark treatise, championing the Aristotelian method of reasoning and induction, we can trace the same conception regarding art and creativity. That he is following Aristotle is easy to establish:

And, just as, at the outset, Aristotle, by forging a crucible [or method] for analysis, made ready the judge, so here he now advances his client to the authoritative position of

\(^{45}\) Ibid, p. 9, section 24.
\(^{48}\) Introduction to the *Metalogicon* by John D. McGarry, p. xix.
\(^{49}\) Ibid, p. xxv.
teacher. Which is in well-chosen order, since one who has credibility fulfilled the function of judge deserves to be elevated to the master’s chair.50

In speaking of art, he begins in Book Eleven:

Art is a system of reason [gerendorum] has devised in order to expedite, by its own short cut, our ability to do things within our natural capabilities. Reason neither provides nor professes to provide the accomplishment of the impossible. Rather, it substitutes for the spendthrift and roundabout ways of nature a concise, direct method of doing things that are possible. It further begets (so to speak) a faculty of accomplishing what is difficult. Wherefore the Greeks also called it methodon, that is, so to speak, an efficient plan, which avoids natures wastefulness, and straightens out her circuitous wanderings so that we may more correctly and easily accomplish what we are to do. However vigorous it may be, nature cannot attain the facility of an art unless it be trained. At the same time, nature is the mother of all the arts, to which she has given reason as their nurse for their improvement and perfection.51

Salisbury’s eloquence, even in translation, is apparent. But equally, his debt to Aristotle and Cicero should be clear. In the following passage, he follows and summarizes Aristotle perfectly:

Nature first evokes our natural capacity to perceive things, and then, as it were, deposits these perceptions in the secure treasury of our memory. Reason then examines, with its careful study, those things which have been perceived, and which are to be, or to have been, commended to memory’s custody. After its scrutiny of their nature, reason pronounces true and accurate judgment concerning each of these (unless, perhaps, it slips in some regard). Nature has provided beforehand these three natural capacities [natural capacity, memory, and reason] as both the foundation and instruments of all the arts.52

In Book 12, Salisbury adds depth:

…are called arts [either] because they delimit [artant] by rules and precepts; or from virtue, in Greek known as ares, which strengthens minds to apprehend the ways of wisdom; or from reason, called arso, by the Greeks, which the arts nourish and cause to grow.53

It is certainly true that what Salisbury was speaking about were the rules of logic and argument that are the foundation of the Aristotelian method. However, Salisbury extends the idea

50 John of Salisbury, p. 213.
51 John of Salisbury, p. 33-4.
52 Ibid, p. 34.
53 Ibid, pp. 36-7.
of all areas of endeavor, “...while there are many sorts of arts...”\textsuperscript{54} Again closely following Aristotle, he now quotes him directly:

The only possible way to conceive universals is by induction. But unless we have sense experience, we cannot make inductions. Even though sense perception relates to particular things, scientific knowledge concerning such can only be constructed by the successive steps of sense perception, induction, and formulation of universals...sense perception is a prerequisite for memory; the memory of frequently repeated sense perception results in experimental proof.\textsuperscript{55}

Blending the concepts of memory, experience, creativity and art, he writes near the end of the work, in a more fully developed argument, when he speaks about the sense and their relationship to knowledge and creativity:

Aristotle asserts that sensation is a power of the soul, rather than a bodily state of passive receptivity. However, Aristotle admits that in order for this power to form an estimation of things, “it must be excited by a [bodily] state of being affected by action.” As it perceives things, our soul stores up their images within itself, and in the process of retaining and often recalling them, builds up for itself a sort of treasury of the memory. And as it mentally revolves the images of these things, there arises imagination, which proceeds beyond mere recollection of previous perceptions, to fashion, by its own [creative] activity, other representations similar to these.\textsuperscript{56}

Later, in Book II chapter thirteen, he adds depth, and a direct point of connection to Fiore, which we’ll see later in the chapter dedicated to him, where Fiore graphically illustrates the “keys” to successful control of his opponent:

Furthermore, one who takes account of attendant reasons, more easily discriminates between the true and the false in all instances, and is in a better position to understand and to teach...But every art has its own special methods, which we may figuratively characterize as its “approaches” or “keys.”\textsuperscript{57}

\textit{Salisbury and The Martial Arts}

Writing more than two hundred years prior to Fiore dei Liberi, Salisbury’s summary of

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid, p. 215. This is drawn, according to McGarry’s notes, from the \textit{Posterior Analytics}, i, 13, 81b, 2ff and ii, 19, 100a, 3ff, according to his notes 82 and 84 on the page above.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid, p. 217.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid, p. 104.
an art’s objective remained current, even in Fiore’s day: “A wide knowledge of probabilities constitutes a master key whose use is universal.” This, in a nutshell, is that the medieval masters were striving for; to find the “master key” which would ground their students in techniques with universal application. At the same time, while the ordinary combatant probably did not have the leisure to study Salisbury’s “wide knowledge of probabilities,” they certainly did demonstrate a foundation of knowledge, built largely on experience, but one that also may well have encoded core principles into their understanding. The perceptions made by Luigi Barbasetti in 1932 of a, “certain analogy with regard to the form of the weapons and the instructions regarding them,” was likely based upon the aggregate observations, experimentation and experience of thousands of combatants constantly refining the art of combat throughout Europe during the long period where swords and shock weapons were dominant. The fighting masters attempted to synthesize this experience still further, sorting and categorizing into even more refined distillations of what took place on the field of combat and within the lists.

Finally, Salisbury concludes with an interesting note relating theory and practice which we will find echoed strongly in Döbringer: “Rules alone are useless. Theoretical principles must be consolidated by practice and assiduous exercise, except perhaps where a disposition has already been transformed into habit.”

I propose that the medieval masters of swordsmanship, in articulating systems of weapons-use, strove to understand the underlying principles which governed chivalric and civilian weapons-use. Insofar as these arts were “martial,” we find cause to employ the term, “martial arts.” That these principles were not invented by the masters but were simply clearly articulated by them was seen in our previous chapters.

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59 Ibid, p. 245.
Recording and Remembering: Memory Palaces

In today’s written (and digitally projected) society, it is difficult to appreciate the importance of memory in pre-printing press cultures. Although the degree to which medieval people were literate has come under scrutiny, with the old assumptions of illiteracy meeting a potent challenge,60 there can be little doubt that memory was of crucial importance during the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance. Despite the lack of readily available books, it seems clear that considerable sophistication continued, much of it transmitted through oral means, and preserved in human memory. Evidence for this survives in monastic practice and in the songs and lays that preserved cultural traditions. The means of exercising and preserving huge amounts of material survives today in the teaching methods through which the Koran and the Hadith are memorized by Muslim students, and in many tribal societies. Indeed, Carruthers would largely do away with what she considers to be an artificial distinction between oral and written culture, instead thinking of different kinds of literacy and the symbols employed to convey textual meaning.

Medieval theory on memory may be divided broadly into two parts. The first, what I would term formal methods, include educational tracts with strong classical roots that guided monastic, legal, cathedral and university education. This tradition, from which survives a rich history of treatises including works by Aristotle, Plato, Cicero, Quintilian, Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, Ramon Lull, and a great many others, has been well documented by scholars such as Frances A. Yates, Marry Carruthers, Robert Black, and Paul F. Grendler. I discuss this tradition below.

Informal methods consist of techniques in use outside of the formal educational system. They are much harder to pin down, because they consisted of lays, songs, and other verse used to teach and to remember cultural history, but they might also have been used, as with the German *merkeverse*, to teach elements such as science and astrology outside of the cathedral school setting.\(^{61}\) It is likely, I think, that some of the elements of formal mnemonic technique would have been used amongst informal practitioners of the *ars memorativa*. On this category much less work has been assayed, and very little that is satisfactory. Any survey on the topic leads into the quicksand of literary “oral theory” and countless numbers of works trying to tease meaning from the transition from orally transmitted material into prose.\(^{62}\)

Both traditions are of importance with respect to the fighting treatises. While I hope to establish the probable existence of older, oral forms of martial arts teachings in at least part of Europe, the recording of such techniques into books follows traditions and innovations with respect to thought and memory that were current in the more formal educational settings.

*The Classical Roots of Medieval Approaches to Memory*

In every discipline artistic theory is of little avail without unremitting exercise, but especially in mnemonics, theory is almost valueless unless made good by industry, devotion, toil, and care. You can make sure that you have as many places as possible and that these conform as much as possible to the rules; in placing the images you should exercise every day.\(^{63}\)

—Anonymous *Ad Herennium*
Attributed in the Middle Ages to Cicero

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\(^{61}\) Planetkinder verse, KS II IV.

\(^{62}\) Most of the sources on such informal sources devolve quickly into literary criticism, and it was only with difficulty that I extracted my attentions from her unwanted advances. Mary J. Carruthers and Frances Yates focus on the formal methods, with very little if any attention given to the informal. While Kurt Danziger does approach the topic in a brief fashion as part of his holistic survey of memory apparatus, the work is not well cited and the accuracy of his assertions must remain open to question. However, Danziger is excellent at keeping the whole history of mnemonic devices in context: this is a book about the forest, not the trees.

\(^{63}\) *Ad Herennium*, III, xxiv, p. 40.
For just as a person with a trained memory a memory of things themselves is immediately caused by the mere mention of their places, so these habits too will make a man readier in reasoning, because he has his premises classified before his mind’s eye, each under its number.  


Most Medieval and Renaissance thought on memory derives from a relatively limited number of classical texts that can be broken down into two major strands; not surprisingly, the Aristotelian and the Platonic. Plato expressed his thinking in the *Phaedra*, wherein memory is actually “recollection” of truth forms. Memory is thus an act of Truth, while oration is an attempt to convince or “show the light” of this kind of proof. Frances Yates believes to be the impetus behind the proto-scientific works of Ramon Lull and his influential ideas of Lullism so influential in France and Italy during the fourteenth century. But the dominant Aristotelian strand appears to begin with Cicero’s First and Second Rhetorics, *De inventione* and the *ad Herennium*, respectively. The *ad Herennium* was thought to have been written by Cicero until Lorenzo Valla decoupled it in 1540. This in turn was built upon Aristotle’s conception of memory, expressed in his *De memoria et reminiscencia*, although this connection was not understood until the thirteenth century, when Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas brought their considerable knowledge to bear and ascertained that Marcus Tullus Cicero’s instructions were in fact based on Aristotle. Memory, for the ancients, was a matter central to rhetoric, since it was comprised of one of the keys to prudence (*prudentia*), itself comprised of three parts:

Prudence is the knowledge of what is good, what is bad and what is neither good nor bad. Its parts are memory, intelligence, and foresight (*memoria, intelligentia, providentia*). Memory is the faculty by which the mind recalls what has happened. Intelligence is the

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66 For the best account of the interaction of the humanist tradition with the memory treatises Yates remains the most important study. For this reference, see Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966, p. 125.

67 See Yates, p. 32.
faculty that ascertains what it is. And Foresight is the faculty by which it is seen that something is going to occur before it occurs.  

Aristotle, and the great majority who followed him, saw memory as a sort of impression, as a signet makes upon a wax seal. This imagery was carried on *ad infinitum*, and was common also to the Platonic view, which, building upon Plato’s allegory of the cave, saw all of reality as a mere impression or shadow of a distantly-recalled truth. But for Aristotle, memory *was* truth, because it tied to his conceptions of art and beauty. It was a natural process, based on his theory expressed in *De anima*. The five senses are worked upon by imagination, which is the “intermediary between perception and thought.”69 It is a kind of portrait, “the lasting state of which we describe as memory.”70 The rest of the *De memoria et reminiscencia* is better distilled by Cicero and Quintilian, and this is of particular importance since the *ad Herennium* long carried the authority of Ciceronian authorship.71

The essence of the *ad Herennium*’s technique was to fix in memory a place (*locus*) for the images which come in two kinds (*res*) and words (*verba*). This formula was maintained intact until the overthrow of memory-based learning with the enlightenment.72

Key to the process was the creation of the places, *loci*. It is a place “easily grasped by memory,” such as a house, the space between columns, an arch, a tree, or something similar. This idea of an architectural framework underscores the literary nature of the blend of image and text that characterizes not only medieval books production, but also buildings. Architectural models are the basis for the “memory palaces” which become ubiquitous but also bound up with

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69 Aristotle, *De anima* 427b, 18-22.
71 The importance of the *Ad Herennium* has been addressed not only in Yates and Carruthers, but also by Harry Caplan, *Of Eloquence: Studies in Ancient and Medieval Rhetoric*, edited by Anne King & Helen North, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970.
occultism during the late medieval period and into the Renaissance.\textsuperscript{73} It may also explain the myriad architectural frames that appear as ubiquitous in medieval and Renaissance painting.

It was crucial that this \textit{locus} be created by the memorizer himself. It must be familiar, evocative. Mary J. Carruthers, in the last part of her \textit{The Book of Memory}, discusses the critical nature of the connection of emotion and memory in the Middle Ages. But treatises glossing or adapting the classical works spent considerable time creating what amounts to a mental indexing matrix characterized not by an impersonal grid, but rather a matrix built around a familiar structure. Over and over again, classical and medieval authors discuss the creation of the loci as the first step in memorizing.

Once the \textit{loci} have been brought firmly in mind, they were populated with \textit{items}. These objects, sometimes iconic and sometimes simply evocative, were thought to encode complex ideas into a kind of summa. Here the object could be broken down into two types: \textit{ad verbum} and \textit{ad res}. Objects, by their nature, encapsulated the essence of an idea, its core essence, known as \textit{res}. In many cases, knowing the \textit{res} of a thing was considered to be sufficient, as the stored ideas could be quickly arranged to meet a rhetorical need, as a lawyer might need to do during an oral legal argument or an orator might need to do in a speech. Informally, the same idea might well have been used for the keeping of cultural “texts” clear in memory, since the wording would not have been of supreme importance. The classical art, as presented in the \textit{ad Herennium}, focuses on the careful placement of objects around the memory palace, which could then be recalled in any order.

The second source that survived into the Middle Ages and which proved even more

\textsuperscript{73} This is the real thrust of Yates’ work, focusing as it does on the Humanist extensions to the memory palace concept, such as Giulio Camillo’s amazing 1534 memory theater. Camillo apparently built the theater in full scale, and it captured the interest of both Italian princes and the French crown. These occult ideas also flourished alongside more traditional Humanist thoughts, building on traditions in the Kabala, in Lullism, and zodiacal studies, amongst other sources.
influential was Quintilian (b. 35 AD), whose books give a parallel picture of using *loci* and precise instructions for how the memory-image was to be constructed. But these elaborate constructs were, for Quintilian, a bit cumbersome, and good for remembering *things* rather than complex *ideas*. For these, visualization of the words as written on the wax tablet, potentially augmented through the marks of a personal system of notation, *notae*, which could then be recalled by visualizing the passage’s placement on the tablet itself. This notational concept was taken up with vigor in the medieval systems as increasingly sophisticated (or sometimes merely complex) schematics, memory ladders, trees and other indexing and heuristic systems were proposed in order to categorize and break down material into memorable segments.

*Ars Memorativa in the Middle Ages*

The sparseness of texts during the Middle Ages, a point skirted by Carruthers and Yates (whose analyses rely on surviving texts) but emphasized by Kurt Danziger, must be a central theme in any consideration of the role of memory during the Middle Ages. Books were scarce, precious, and could not necessarily be consulted whenever the need arose. Instead, books served as aids to memory, visual representations—mnemonic devices—meant to assist the reader in fixing the ideas in his own mind. Until the fourteenth century, this remained the case, and the number of texts remained relatively small, a self-referential almost closed system constructed around ecclesiastical texts. Even books of law, such as the *Decretals*, were meant to be learned and stored in memory.

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74 Danziger argues that this occurred in the fifteenth century, but I would argue that it came first as a part of the “little Renaissance” and later, as a consequence both of the printing press and of dramatically increased trade and the money economy, since commerce created wealth and demand for books and literature of all kinds, as well as increased demand for legal services. Lay piety might also have played a role, since it too created demand for books, and an increasingly educated laity would in turn put more pressure on preachers to augment their arguments with scripture and literature by the church fathers.
Although “Tullius” “Second Rhetoric” was largely unknown prior to the twelfth century, the *De inventione*, was known. But these classical texts had more influence with the Scholastic revival, even though the rhetorical arts themselves received relatively light praise. St. Augustine wrote on memory, and it is likely that his passages proved the vehicle through which the arts of memory were seen in the course of the medieval period prior to the Scholastics. Augustine writes:

I come to the fields and spacious palaces of memory (*campos et lata praetorian memoriae*), where are the treasures of innumerable images, brought into it from things of all sorts perceived by the senses. There is stored up, whatever besides what we think, either by enlarging or diminishing, or any other way varying those things which the sense has come to; and whatever else has been committed and laid up, which forgetfulness has not yet swallowed up and buried. When I enter there, I require instantly what I will to be brought forth, and something instantly comes; others must be longer sought after, which are fetched, as it were out of some inner receptacle; others rush out in troops…Other things come up readily, in unbroken order, as they are called for; those in front making way for the following; and as they make way, they are hidden from sight, ready to come when I will. All which takes place when I recite a thing by heart.\textsuperscript{75}

But Augustine’s analogy only loosely approximates the elaborate system discussed in the *ad Herennium*, instead invoking Cicero’s simpler division of memory into “natural” and “artificial.” Indeed, from a further passage, it becomes increasingly clear that Augustine’s inspiration is indeed Platonic, which is hardly a surprise:

Behold in the plains, and caves, and caverns of my memory, innumerable and innumerably filled with innumerable kinds of things, either as images, as all bodies; or by actual presence, as the arts; or by certain notions and impressions, as the affections of the mind which, even when the mind does not feel, the memory remains, while yet whatever is in the memory is also in the mind—over all these do I run, I fly; I dive on this side and that, as far as I can, there is no end.”\textsuperscript{76}

You have given this honor to my memory to reside in; but in what quarter of it You reside, that I am considering. For in thinking of You, I have passed beyond such parts of it as the beasts also have, for I found Thee not there among the images of corporeal things; and I came to those parts to which I have committed the affections of my mind, nor found You there. And I have entered into the very seat of my mind…neither were

\textsuperscript{7} Augustine, *Confessions*, X, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., X, p. 17
You there...And why seek I now in what place You dwell, as if there were places therein?..Place there is none; we go forward and there is no place....

As Frances Yates eloquently argues, “It is as a Christian that Augustine seeks God in memory; and as a Christian Platonist, believing that knowledge of the divine is innate in memory.” While Augustine does not discuss classical methods of artificial memory, they seem implicit in his model for the way that memory works. Later, he underscores the importance of memory as he confers upon memory great importance as one of the three key powers of the soul, which include Memory, Understanding, and Will.

Given the overwhelming concern with moral instruction, it is no surprise that medieval theological considerations on memory focused on the “First Rhetoric” of Cicero, the De inventione, where we may recall, assessed the virtue of Prudence as comprising memoria, intellegentia, and providentia. Thus, moralists could and did argue, memory and judgment were component parts of Prudence, one of the seven cardinal virtues. And from a practical point of view, priests and monks had to commit considerable material to memory, such as the more than one hundred and fifty psalms and the books of the bible itself. From the fifth to the eleventh century not much is known about pedagogy, but in the fifth century we do find several developments that become well documented following the scholastic movement. First, works become divided into chapters, and numbering / lettering systems are added. Second, illuminated capitals and border illuminations begin to adorn the manuscript pages, which were for a very long time were thought to be merely decorative, or stories for the uneducated, much like stained glass.

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78 Frances A Yates, op. cit., p. 48.
79 This Augustinian thread may arise potently in one of the fighting treatises, the fourteenth century treatise on jousting and horsemanship by Dom Duarte of Portugal, who speaks at great length about the importance of will to the soul and to the practical matter of flinching in the joust. He uses the test of the joust as a test of strength of character, more than of body, and it is because of this momentous discussion that I classify his book more as a chivalric moral treatise as much as a practical guide. See the English translation, translated by Luis and Antonio Franco Preto, The Royal Book of Horsemanship, Jousting and Knightly Combat, Highland Village, TX: Chivalry Bookshelf, 2005.
glass windows and painted friezes in a gothic cathedral. But these methods of dividing the text and associating the words with an image on a page recalls the notae of Quintilian, as well as embodiments of the pratoraen memoria of artificial memory espoused by the ad Herennium. It seems likely that the classical ideas never fell completely out of use, even if their attribution faded into obscurity. As Robert Black has noted, formal education of the period had to approach Latin as a “second language,” and the advanced educational techniques he surveys would have been de rigeur for those who needed Latin, but unfortunately his book does not offer any insight into vernacular pedagogical techniques. We do know, thanks to Robert Black, that it was not until the tenth century that the “de-Latinization” of the grammar curriculum during the dark ages started to reverse, but it is interesting that one of the first works to be reintroduced was Cicero’s De inventione. Quintilian seems to have been studied, to a limited degree, prior to the scholastics, but surprisingly, I can find no mention of the ad Herennium in Black’s treatment on Italian humanist education.

When Charlemagne brought Alcuin of York to the Franks in order to restore the educational system in the eighth century, Alcuin produced a dialogue, Concerning Rhetoric and Virtue:

Charlemagne: What now, are you to say about Memory, which I deem the noblest part of rhetoric?

Alcuin: What indeed unless I repeat the words of Marcus Tullius that ‘Memory is the treasure house of all things and unless it is made custodian of the thought-out things and words, we know that all the other parts of the orator, however distinguished they may be, will come to nothing.’

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80 Even the Gothic cathedral itself is seen as a kind of literature, not only by Mary J. Carruthers, but by many art historians, such as E. Panofsky.
81 Frances Yates asserts that Quintilian’s complete works, including his tracts on artificial memory, were unknown prior to the twelfth century, when a complete set was finally located.
Charlemagne: Are there not other precepts which tell us how it can be obtained and increased?

Alcuin: We have no other precepts about it, except exercise in memorizing, practice in writing, application to study, and the avoidance of drunkenness, which does the greatest possible injury to all studies…83

Note that while De interpretatione is cited, nothing is mentioned about the ad Herennium or its contents, or the works of Quintilian. Indeed, memory is not even really discussed as a part of Prudence, just as an important aid to any kind of study. This “practical” approach may well have characterized verse encodings such as the fighting treatises, where the moralizing purpose of monastic and cathedral-based education would have been a secondary consideration at best. But what the passage shows is that the formal classical sources were unknown even to a scholar of Alcuin’s renown. While (fairly corrupt and incomplete) copies of the ad Herennium were known in the ninth century, no complete manuscripts were known before the twelfth century, with the rise of the Scholastics.

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During the twelfth century, three developments may have contributed to the dramatic increase in demand for written literature. First, the rise of the university had begun the process both of spirited debate not only between the Scholastics themselves, but between students as well. The burgeoning university cultures at Paris, Bologna and elsewhere drew tens of thousands of new consumers into debate. Second, Scholasticism itself drove a demand for increasing access to books and increasingly detailed requirements for citation and detailed, accurate references to scriptural authority. Third, the rising money economy generated demand for books, and for knowledge generally, as trade stimulated all aspects of society. It was in this atmosphere that the

Scholastics, led by Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas, revived many classical texts and the study of the ancients, including the *ad Herennium* and the Philosopher himself, Aristotle.

Albertus Magnus’ *de bono*, like earlier works (such as by Boncompagno),\(^{84}\) focused on the theme of moralism expressed through the old model of seven virtues and seven vices. As such, the treatises written by Magnus and Aquinas are not treatments of rhetoric, but are rather moved to ethics, where its association with the virtue of prudence brought it a renewed importance.

Magnus’ treatise begins by citing Cicero, “Tullius at the end of the First Rhetoric, where he says that the parts of Prudence are *memoria*, *intelligentia*, and *providentia*.”\(^{85}\) As he writes, however, Magnus’ purpose of writing is concerned with “the good,” or ethics. But not only does he have access to the *ad Herennium*, but to Aristotle himself, “What he [Tullius] says of artificial memory, which is confirmed by induction and rational precept…belongs not to memory but to reminiscence, as Aristotle says in the book *De memoria et reminiscencia*.”\(^{86}\) In classic Scholastic form of challenge and rebuttal, he first establishes that memory is in fact part of prudence, then goes into great detail describing the artificial memory techniques, and how they might be used in the service of virtue (*prudentia*). Additionally, he describes the importance of images as holding *intentio*, an intention, that are associated with them. A wolf, for example, holds the *intentio* of viciousness, of the intent and summary of viciousness, its essence. This is the idea of *res* that

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\(^{84}\) Boncompagno’s main work, the *Rhetorical novissima*, was written in 1225 at Bologna. Boncompagno asserts that 1) memory is a natural gift; 2) natural memory is the gift as received and 3) that “artificial” memory is “the auxiliary and assistant to natural memory…called ‘artificial’ from ‘art’ because it is found artificially through subtility of mind.” *Rhetorical novissima*, ed. A Gaudentinio, Biblioteca Iuridica Medii Aevi, II, Bologna, 1891, p. 255, cited in Frances Yates, p. 58.

\(^{85}\) Albertus Magnus, *De bono*, cited from Appendix B of Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, p. 268. The three exceptionally useful appendices include references from Albertus Magnus, Hugh of Saint Victor, and Thomas Bradwardine. These are usefully augmented by the surfeit of sources offered in her sourcebook, *The Medieval Craft of Memory: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002. Included are translated commentaries by both Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas on Aristotle’s *De memoria et reminiscencia*.

\(^{86}\) Ibid., p. 269.
Mary Carruthers speaks so much about in her treatment of writing and page composition as literature *in toto*. Supremely influential in the scholastic movement, we can detect a harnessing of the classical ideas in Magnus’ text for ethical ends. Interestingly, Magnus’ works contain no specific reference to Quintilian. His final comments neatly summarize his position:

> We say that the *ars memorandi* which Tullius teaches is the best and particularly for things to be remembered pertaining to life and judgment, and such memories pertain particularly to the moral man and to the speaker because since the act of human life consists in particulars it is necessary that it should be in the soul through corporeal images; it will not stay in memory save in such images. Whence we say that of all the things which belong to Prudence, the most necessary is all of memory, because from past things we are directed and to present and future things, and not the other way around.87

With Thomas Aquinas, the moralizing character of the scholastics reaches its apex. The methods of artificial memory as suitable not only for memorizing texts, but the very intention and action of exercising artificial memory in fact exercises virtue through directing the senses towards ethical conduct. Most of his analysis, written in his commentaries on Aristotle’s *De memoria et reminiscencia*, closely follows Magnus’ own writings in *De bono*. First, he makes the connection between memory and prudence, following both Cicero and Aristotle. Second, he gives instructions for and lauds the techniques of artificial memory drawn from the ad Herennium and from Aristotle’s work. But he then takes his commentary a step further, associating the physical memory with weaknesses in the human soul:

> It is manifest from the preceding to what part of the soul memory belongs, that is to say to the same part as *phantasy*. And those thing are per se memorable of which there is a phantasy, that is to say, the *sensibilia*. But the *intelligibilia* are *per accidens* memorable, for these cannot be apprehended by man without a phantasm. And thus it is that we remember less easily those things which are subtle and of spiritual import; and we remember more easily those things which are gross and sensible. And if we should wish to remember intelligible notions more easily, we should link them with some kind of phantasm, as Tullius teaches in his Rhetoric.88

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87 Ibid., *Solution*, Point 20, p. 282.
For Aquinas the reason for reliance upon artificial memory to bolster natural memory is the weakness of man’s corporeal self, which requires an artifice—an art—to “fill in” for his inability to retain the whole of what happens around him.

Of course, it would be hard to over-estimate the influence of Magnus’ and Aquinas on formal education in the Middle Ages. Additionally, the wholesale adoption of many Aristotelian arguments and philosophies, including elements of his *De memoria et reminiscencia*, and his thoughts on art as expressed in the Ethics, must have profoundly affected the worldview of those who enjoyed a formal education—and thus were introduced to various formal systems of memory.89

Dividing into Units

It is curious, perhaps, that neither Albertus Magnus nor Thomas Aquinas invoked or cited Quintilian in their discourses on memory. I find it likely that this was because Quintilian’s advice was oriented primarily at the rhetorician, and his precepts offered in his *Instutitio oratoria* offered little to the moralist ideologues who led the scholastic movement. All the same, elements of Quintilian’s simple and practical advice may be plainly seen not only in the increasing use of indexing schemes, capital letters, and organization into *capitulas*, but were adopted into the Humanist tradition, which following Erasamus quickly dropped the techniques of artificial memory itself.

Quintilian’s form of artificial memory, which revolved around the creation of imagery on the written page to aid the reader in remembering what was on the page through division

89 The Humanists refocused on the original tracts, including the *ad Herennium, Quintilian, De oratore*, and Aristotle’s works. These efforts decoupled the memory palace or classical artificial memory techniques from the moralizing strictures which had been employed by the Scholastics, and led to a whole series of ever-more elaborate memory palace projects during the course of the Renaissance. See especially Frances Yates, who spends considerable time emphasizing the occult nature of some of these projects.
schemes and various notae, survived in form if not in attribution.

In the fifth century, books began to be created with breaks between passages and capitula-markers. This process continued, the traditional red and blue first letters often alternating and with moralizing or symbolic artwork—illuminations—adorning the margins. We see an expression of this tradition in three of Fiore’s works, where the first page is adorned with an illuminated border (spectacularly in the case of Getty MS Ludwig XV 13, the Fior di Battaglia), and each paragraph is adorned with capital letters alternating red and blue. Similarly, in the earliest known treatise, RA MS I.33, small “cross” markers are used to indicate the start of a sequence.

Into this same idea of a schema might be placed Honoret Bonet’s fourteenth century treatise, L’Arbre de Battailles, and in the whole tradition of Lullist memory ladders and biblical concordances that also used circular or grid references. While these techniques are not discussed in Quintilian, they may easily be seen as in his tradition, where dividing into manageable pieces is the core of his advice.

This idea accords also with modern psychological theory, which assesses blocks of memory in a “five to nine” rule, which is recognizes the limitation in short-term memory to hold more than seven digits of information at once time, ±2. These are the small bits, the “divisions” that the tradition of medieval book production kept intact and that probably circulated as inherent methods both for formal and informal education throughout the period.

Chapter breaks, indexes, and memory grids are part an outgrowth of Quintilian’s practical advice for dividing text into manageable pieces, while architectural frames, moralizing animal illuminations and pictorial associations are more associated with the memory palace tradition. We’ll look at both of these traditions in the production of medieval books before concluding with
tentative comments on the role of medieval pedagogical memory techniques in the fighting treatises.

Role of Books in the MA

Images on the page, and on the façades of buildings, were keys to helping the reader to fix ideas into memory. With the advent of the printed book, the role of reading changes, and text becomes no longer an aid to memory, but instead a store of knowledge; consequently, the role of memory itself changes. Mary J. Carruthers makes a potent case for this argument in the final chapter of her *The Book of Memory*, reinforcing her macro-idea that the definition of literature should be expanded to include such communications techniques and mnemonic aids such as paintings and illustrations, sculptures, that the Middle Ages cannot really be thought of as “illiterate,” even though reading books was made difficult by their scarcity.

Early books were, first and foremost, aids to memory. By adding memorable figures to the page, whether they were illuminated or inked capital letters, colorful paragraph markers, illuminated scenes from the text, moralizing marginalia based on such current folktales as Reynard the Fox, or cryptic *notae*, the whole text—the page as an image as well as words—was a mnemonic device.

As books and writing technology became more widely available, starting in the twelfth century but extending in a solid advance even up to the development of Gutenberg’s press, it seems likely that earlier traditions, which had been preserved only by less permanent or less fixed methods of oral transmission, could finally be committed to parchment or vellum. So from the twelfth century to the sixteenth, the role of books gradually shifts, and an increasing number of books creates a vastly increased body of knowledge that can no longer be held *in memoria.* As
Fiore writes:

And therefore do I say that none of my scolari, especially those above-said, fail to have my book in the Art of Combat other than Sir Galeazzo da Mantua, who likes to say that without books, none can be a qualified [bon] magistro. And I, Fiore, confirm the truth of this: that is to say that this Art is so deep [longue] that no man in the world has a great enough memory to hold even a quarter of the Art; and also that with but a quarter of the Art known, none can be a magistro.

By the time Fiore is writing, in 1409, the role of the book seems to be changing rapidly. One cannot, as he says, be a good master without books, because, “the Art is so deep that no one in the world has enough memory to hold even a quarter of the Art [in memory].” While the book is clearly structured as a memory aid, it is also a store of knowledge, a reference work. Hence, the fighting treatise, at least of Fiore, appears transitional between the “old way” and the “new way” of using books.

Tracing Formal Memory Techniques in Medieval Fighting Treatises

In Fiore’s treatise, and in the work by Paulus Kal, we see this tradition clearly played out in the segno, where the four qualities of audatia, prudentia, forteza, and celeritas were paired with the lion, lynx, elephant, and tiger respectively, each keyed and holding an object. The lion holds a heart (courage), the lynx a pair of dividers (measure), the elephant carries a tower on his back (stability), and the tiger an arrow (lightening, quickness).

In Paulus Kal (lower left), the hawk-headed man has augŠ als ein falk das man mich nit beschalk, “eyes like a falcon so that I will not be fooled,” als ein leo das ich hin zu streb, “a heart
like a lion so that I strive forward,” and *fües als ein hind das ich hin zu und dar von spring*, “feet like a hind so that I spring towards and away.”[^92] It is striking that the lion figures into both *segni*.

These diagrams are similar to those which attempt to map out medieval vices and virtues, encoding a great deal of information into familiar creatures of the bestiary, affiliating animal qualities as suggested by the twelfth century Hugh of Saint Victor—the “old” way of viewing books—yet they are also, as Fiore says in the quote cited above, stores of information—the “new” way of viewing them.

We have seen already how the verse of Royal Armouries MS I.33 was built around a central verse, probably preserved as an oral tradition, before it was recorded in the manuscript along with an extensive *glosa* and illustrations. Also, Johannes Liechtenauer’s verse, which he implored his students not to commit to writing (for reasons of secrecy), his *zettel*, was considered to be *merkeverse*, teaching verse, and was claimed to describe an art “hundreds” of years old. While the verse in “Liechtnauer’s Art” may composed and created by Master Lichtenauer to describe things he had seen done (and as such the verse may not be older than the mid-14th century), the verse in RA MS I.33 must be at least as old as 1300, the date of the manuscript itself, and is likely much older. In the earliest surviving copy of Fiore, dating to 1409-10, we find “execrable poetry,” but the crude verses are probably not poetry at all (any more than the *zettel* are), but are rather a kind of mnemonic Fiore may have used to teach his Art early in his career. By 1420, the probable date for the much more sophisticated Getty (and Morgan), the old verse method is abandoned, and Fiore uses instead prose paragraphs to carry a fuller explanation of his intention. Could this be because his text was destined for a non-student, a noble patron, Niccolò d’Este III? Without personal instruction from Fiore, the mnemonics would no longer serve their

intention; the personal link broken, the book itself may become the transmitting agent, and thus the older “shorthand” methods may no longer suffice.

Robert Black’s cornerstone work, *Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, traces the use of grammar books in Italy and around Europe throughout the period under consideration here. By grammar, of course, we mean formal instruction in Latin. From Black we learn that Fiore’s term *magistro* merely meant “teacher,” as we find from the phrase, *maestri di leggere e scrivere*. Interestingly, this language closely parallels Fiore’s own *Prologio*, as we have seen in the last chapter. Moreover, there are sharper parallels: Fiore’s early works, the *Arti Luctandi* and the *Flos Duellatorum*, follow the verse presentation of Alexander and Eurard, whose methods were influential in Northern Italy during the third and fourth quarters of the fourteenth century. Black even provides an example of a fourteenth century school located in Cividale during 1360-80, where Fiore claims to have been from. This lends powerful support to the assertion Fiore makes that he knew how to “read, write and draw,” according to basic instruction he may have received as a youth in Cividale, especially if he was indeed from the “noble” dei Liberi family, as he claimed. Fiore also follows the school-model of the master and scholar for his plays, as did the priest and scholar in the I.33 treatise. It is interesting that during the course of the fourteenth century, the style of teaching Latin was updated, emphasizing instead of rote memory more creative use of the language with compositional problems, and there was increased teaching in the vernacular. This development also parallels Fiore’s latter two works, the Getty and the Morgan, which are much more sophisticated not only in technique and in the artistic presentation offered, but also in the prose vernacular descriptions of the techniques,

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94 Ibid., p. 52-53.
95 Ibid., p. 114.*
tactical options, and principal lessons. There would seem to be a very strong case that Fiore dei Liberi possessed a modicum of formal education, and it becomes increasingly evident during the course of the fifteenth century that some fencing masters would advance beyond the “red light” district, in part based on their ability to survive in the rich Humanist courts of Renaissance princes, and for that leap, education was crucial.
CHAPTER 6

TOWARDS A CONCEPTION OF MEDIEVAL MARTIAL ARTS

I, Fiore, knowing how to read, to write and to draw, and having books in this Art, have studied well for forty years or more. While in this Art I am not a perfect master, I am held so by great Lords who remain my scholars. Therefore I say to them, had I studied for forty years in [civil] law, the decretals, and in medicine, as I studied in the Art of Arms, I would surely be a doctor of these three sciences. And in this science of arms I have had great travail, labor and expense, in order that I be spoken of as a good scholar by others. I consider that in this Art few in could themselves find masters. And because I desire to make a memorial of it, I hereby make a book of all the Art, of all the things which I know of weapons and their handling, and of other things that follow the order which yet I will have given.¹

—Fiore dei Liberi, Fior di Battaglia

Traditionally, historians of military history, ideas and culture have faced grave difficulties in understanding medieval warfare and the physical combat that accompanied it. Warfare, of course, is a fundamentally human activity, common to all known cultures. It is human because it involves human beings, and because it ends the lives of still other human beings, alongside the grave dislocation and disruption it can bring. Warfare or the capability to harness violence lies at the heart of many aspects of the human experience, from the individual affairs of men approaching one another on the street to the campaigns and battles that overturn kingdoms, end states and dramatically change cultures. It would seem, therefore, that understanding war and the combat that underlies war would be an academic imperative.

¹ Fiore dei Liberi, Fior di Battaglia, Getty mss., op. cit., fol. 2r, transcription from Massimo Malipiero, p. 427-8, “Et io Fiore lo confermo vero: chè quest’arte è si long ache lo non è al mo[n]do homo de sì granda memoria che podesse tenere a mente senza libri la quarta parte de quest’arte. Adoncha cum la quarta parte di questa’arte non sapiendo più non sarìa magistro, ché io Fiore sapiendo leçere e scrivere e disegnare et habiendo libri in quest’arte et in ley ó studiando ben XL anni o piú. Anchora non son ben perfetto magistro in quest’arte benché sia tegnudo di grandi signori che sono stadi miei scolari ben e perfetto magistro in l’arte predetta. E sì digo che s’io avesse studiato XL anni in leçe decretali e in midisina chome i’ò studiato in l’arte de larmicare, che io sarìa doctore in quelle tre scientie. Et in questa scientia d’armizare ó habiuda grande briga cum fadiga e spesa d’esseru pur bon scolaro disemo d’altro.”
Whatever one’s views about the inevitability of war, or about the moral status of war, understanding it is crucial to understanding humanity—at least for the foreseeable future.

In the medieval case, war and violence were never far from common experience. All three elements of the tripartite medieval order—divided by those who worked, those who prayed, and those who fought—engaged in or could foresee themselves as engaged in personal combat for a wide variety of reasons. It is not too much to say, perhaps, that elements of military culture played a role in many lives during the period. And military culture means fighting, at some level—in war, against bandits or robbers, in riots, in the ludic contests known as jousts or tournaments, in playful or earnest practice. Not all, but a great many people during the Middle Ages and into the early Renaissance not only participated in violence, ritualized or actual; they celebrated it and welded it into the fabric of society through the concept of renown. It was demonstrated for spectators in battle, on the tournament field, and in country and civic martial contests. It then played its usual role as an important regulator of power relationships within medieval society and in the great struggles such as the contest between of secular and ecclesiastical authority, or the relationship between the Christian West and the Muslim East. It touched relationships all along the social spectrum, and the ability to fight—to protect and project personal, family, royal, ecclesiastical, institutional, or cultural power—lay then as it lies now at the heart of many critical relationships.

Medieval military culture was fundamentally a physical culture, more than a literate one. This reality has made it very hard to study using the rigor of the academy, for the Arts of Mars are rarely recorded in the tomes, accounts, records and letters that form the favorite sources for the historian. There are no field studies available to avail the sociologist, no body of patient records to assist the psychologist, no oral histories and no unit records, after-action reports, or
mission orders to assist the military historian. In medieval thinking, a man’s good name, his renown, was the measure of his accomplishments on and off the fighting field. Should his renown shine brightly, his name was sometimes added to the lists of valiant men whose deeds were celebrated by men such as Jean Froissart, but far more often, names were not committed to writing and their deeds passed into stories, into legend and myth, and finally into dust. What remains today is but a dim understanding of that chivalric culture—the culture that established an intricate system of rules governing warfare, international traffic, and standards of conduct that remain potent elements of Western culture. But in having even this dim view we are fortunate, for a great many other cultures that have relied on oral traditions to define their identity have long faded completely or nearly completely away, existing more in our collective imagination than in the historical record.

But writing and books are the main tools of the historian. Unfortunately, in terms of understanding medieval warfare, and the fighting and strategy that underlies it, these records have proven both difficult and woefully incomplete. Accounts of battles were usually, if not always, written by clerks, rather than by the knights themselves. To these are added the romantic and quasi-romantic corpus of chivalric literature intended to be heard and sometimes read by the chivalric audience. These were often fictionalized, and while the self-conceptions recorded therein are important, they are generally not historically accurate in terms of the actions and events they portray. More recently, account-books have been opened and are being thoroughly analyzed alongside legal materials. These sources, however, have their own issues, in that they were often written to establish a particular end (such as the collection of royal payments, as in the case of English indentures) and so may distort, much like a modern insurance claim. Medieval books on the theory of war—usually variations on Vegetius—are sometimes discussed
by historians, but their connection to the average or even the better-educated knights remains uncertain. All of these sources present the historian who wishes to understand medieval warfare with significant difficulty.

A large part of the difficulty lies in the ambivalent relationship of the military orders with the written word. Those who fought, especially those further down the social spectrum, did not learn their art—the art of fighting—from books, so there was probably little need to record the physical skills of personal combat and battle in books. Those recording the chivalric culture were typically not members of the military orders, and we have little way of knowing how representative are the writings of those precious few who did, such as Geoffrey de Charny. And even de Charny, as fine an example as he is, wrote not a single word about how the fighting should be learned, or how it should be done. The main surviving spokesmen for the chivalric classes, Charny, Ramon Lull and the anonymous author of the Ordene de Chevalerie, wrote about how fighting should be used, not how it should be done. The same is true for those who wrote for the chivalric orders, such as the troubadours and chroniclers like Jean Froissart or Engeurrand de Monstrelet.

The laboring orders had a similar relationship with writing, until the demands of commerce dramatically expanded the number of people communicating more than daily tallies or legal complaints with parchment, vellum, paper and pen. We find depressingly few of their songs, stories, dances, beliefs and experiences committed to durable writing. But we learn a little from court records, from a few surviving caches of documents such as those of Francesco Datini, and from iconographic depictions scattered in illuminated manuscripts. But these sources often record the unusual, rather than the usual. From the hundreds of surviving recipes, for example, none explain how to make the most common things—bread and beer—because they were so
usual and so had no need of consuming valuable resources with written recordings. Still other mysteries, such as the methods of smelting iron ore, or crafting medieval armour, were considered trade secrets and also remained unrecorded.

Only the clerical orders recorded much detail about their lives and perspectives. As the champions of preserving Roman traditions of literacy, education and piety, church records and the literary skills promulgated within provide one of the few windows into medieval society. As a result, we have a very strong view of what was going on within the cloister, from the ecclesiastical perspective, and about the lives of many clerics. But power distribution in the medieval period lay fractured, like a stained glass window, fragmented between the nobles, commercial, royal and ecclesiastical authority. Informal power was wielded too at the point of a sword by bandits, outlaws, and contracted soldiers such as the condottieri. Clerics, writing about power relationships, naturally had their own views on how such conflicts should be resolved, but these perspectives were not necessarily representative of the whole of medieval society. Moreover, their assertion of social predominance may not have always matched up with the beliefs and world-views of other actors in society, so what we have preserved is, while valuable, not wholly representative.

We know a great deal about “those who prayed,” and about how the church struggled for influence and managed its potent base of power. This perspective is, however, over-represented in academic literature because of the preponderance of surviving written sources created by ecclesiastic sources. We have found, through sources like the Datini cache, that the commercial segment—representing the most influential of “those who worked,” had differing views and experiences. Finally, the information we have about “those who fought,” is, like the commercial segment, under-represented in literature. Fortunately, the romantic literature built up around the
chivalric segments tells us something, as do the account-books, wardrobe accounts, indentures, and legal struggles that were created as a part of their lives. But these were men whose role in society was, at a fundamental level, defined by a central activity: fighting. Outside of the fighting treatises reviewed here and in a precious few written accounts we can take to be accurate—such as the fifteenth century work of Olivier de la Marche—we know very little about this crucial aspect of chivalric life. How men thought about fighting, and about its appropriate use, is critical to understanding not only the realities of medieval warfare sought, for example, in John Keegan’s *Faces of Battle*. But Keegan’s analysis of the fighting itself, while a beautiful and evocative word-picture, is not grounded as soundly as it could be in the realities of how men actually used their bodies and their weapons on the battlefield. In fact, the picture he painted continues to distort, portraying men who bet their lives on their physical abilities with steel and sinew as flailing wildly and randomly in the hopes that endurance and strength would carry the day. This view, as we saw in the first chapter, is not unique to Keegan, but rather is carried across the spectrum of historiographical and popular literature, distorting our view of the medieval period and making it very difficult for us to understand men whose deeds and beliefs helped to shape Western culture.

Understanding that medieval combatants were rational actors in a given cultural and technological framework is important. Keegan’s own efforts to draw a sense of continuity in the horrors of the battlefield would have been even more effective had he known more about how well medieval combatants understood the tools of their trade. By knowing more about how men fought, about the tactical thinking that comprised their approach to physical combat—to their martial art—we can make much better judgments about why they fought and we might learn a great deal more about how they approached battles, ambushes, raids, battles, sieges and wars. In
a real sense, it is likely that there was a tightly bound relationship between how men thought about micro- or personal combat, and how they approached battle and war, which could well be envisioned simply as personal combat writ large. The distinction was probably not so much a matter of different principles as it was one of scale. It is possible that we find no original medieval treatises on war because men understood war and conflict chiefly through the analogue of individual combat. By understanding the principles that governed their personal combat—the medieval martial arts—we can thus gain great insight into how men viewed other aspects of life where conflict and combat played a major role.

As we know from the still-resonant work of Maurice Keen, the chivalric culture of Europe was an international society that envisioned itself as bound through the responsibilities of nobility. These responsibilities, to be sure, ensured their place at the pinnacle of European society, but they also bound individuals through expected norms of behavior expressed in customary practice. The ideals of this society we know as “chivalry,” and the “chivalric ethos” demanded that men of worth be willing to prove themselves in arms, and if necessary, to sacrifice themselves through their duties of loyalty and service. Certainly these ideals were observed as much in the breech as in the practice, but the ideals persisted, communicated through the vehicles of chivalric romance and preserved in the texts of literature, artwork, and physical artifacts.

Chief amongst these symbolic expressions of medieval society were the knight’s horse—the French *chevalier* comes from *cheval*, meaning horse—the knight’s armour, and his sword. The sword itself, according to Ramon Lull and the anonymous but influential and popular *Ordene de Chevalerie*, stood at once for the knight’s prowess, but also for the twin conceptions of justice and mercy. The other chivalric ideals, including prowess, courage, loyalty, largesse,
courtesy, fidelity, humility, and faith, required that the knight adhere to his duties of defense and justice. In return, he would gain renown if others judged his actions worthy of the ideals, and shame if he did not. Malcom Vale, alongside Matthew Strickland and Maurice Keen, have done considerable work showing how these ideals were exercised in the context of the medieval tournament, in jousts and in war. Richard Kaeuper has done compelling work to demonstrate that prowess was the cornerstone virtue of the knight, and certainly, central to the idea of prowess as combat ability. The material in the fighting treatises gives us a glimpse into what that fighting prowess might have looked like at its very best.

These high ideals were echoed in the treatises, where our two military authors, Fiore dei Liberi and Johannes Liechtenauer, took great pains to open their works with chivalric invocations, tying their work to the ideals of the nobility, rather than to the generalis. But these ideals permeated society, and as the urban, commercial segments of society grew in influence and stature, the office of knight gradually morphed into the officer and the gentleman. The idea of prowess remained central, and now the conception of loyalty took on a more territorial and less personal character in a process that culminated with the idea of the citizen-soldier in the French Revolution.

The Medieval Martial Arts

We have now seen, through our three manuscripts, how the ideas of principle-based learning and creative application were applied to the military and civilian martial arts. These arts emphasized different cultural imperatives: the civilian arts of I.33, and the vast family of dueling arts do well documented by Sydney Anglo as “Renaissance” martial arts, emphasized defensiveness and caution. By contrast, the military arts shown by Hanko Döbringer and Fiore
dei Liberi demonstrated an “offensive spirit,” a focus on power, and tactical flexibility. These are consummately chivalric deals, emphasizing boldness, courage, and skill.

But while these arts differ in the cultural imperatives, they are based in the same technological base and use the same weapons. Therefore, all three approaches emphasize efficiency that maximizes the potential for not only the weapons—the dagger, sword, spear, baton and polearm—but also the machine that is the human body. Similar solutions to the problem of initiative and control resulted in similar solutions as were practiced in far-off Asia, using joint-locks and throws, as well as strikes and disarms. Being battlefield arts, ritual played a minimal part in the combat itself, although it could have a great impact on how and where a fight was conducted, as in the case of a tournament or a judicial duel. The distilled principles were developed iteratively over “many hundreds of years,” in the words of Döbringer, but they showcased martial forms that sought to waste nothing in terms of power, motion, position or time.

In the following three sections, I will present the outlines for distilled principles that seem to guide the martial arts of medieval Europe. I will filter the difficulties of language and presentation by example, showing parallels between the three surveyed works; it is my hope that this distillation will offer some clarity in seeing the similarities and differences expressed in these arts, and it will hopefully provide a basis for the descriptive characterization of these arts, in the future distinguishing them from other, equally interesting arts from around the world.

RA MS I.33

We have seen, in the previous chapters, how men conceived of the historical European martial arts through the lenses of three medieval authors. The first author, the anonymous author
of Royal Armouries RA MS I.33, seems to have recorded his gloss and commentary on an earlier oral tradition that encoded martial principles in mnemonic teaching verse. We saw that this method was used also for learning the fundamentals of Latin during the period, and we were perhaps surprised to see these first combatants dressed not in armour or arming clothes but in the robes and raiment of the cloister. Fighting in a church or in a monastery? We noted that, through visitations made in various locations in Iberia, such sword and buckler combats did not seem to be an uncommon phenomenon, despite the church’s official prohibition of clerics carrying weapons. In addition, we saw further references in the Omne Bonum, a fourteenth century encyclopedia, of still more instances and depictions of clerics carrying swords and bucklers just like those depicted in Royal Armouries RA MS I.33. Such “ludic” activities may represent an underground current of martial arts practice within the ranks of monastic brethren, or it could represent efforts to leverage ecclesiastical facilities to host a popular activity in order to better secure the church’s place within the community.

Outside the cloister, the sword and small, round buckler were amongst the most popular weapons for personal self-defense. We found that men carried them in and between towns, and that schools of defense were established as early as the twelfth century in Bologna, Paris and London. We discovered that these establishments were hardly respectable, located as they were in “red light” districts, their students and sometimes their owners caught up with the legal system as brawling sometimes descended into killing. But even on the battlefield, we saw evidence that amongst the men-at-arms, the use of the sword and buckler, even against armoured combatants, was common by the middle of the fourteenth century, if not earlier.

In surveying all of the above sources, we find little evidence about how these weapons were used. Generations of scholars have thus concluded that there was little in the way of studied
principle, a conclusion derived from the evolutionary progressive approach, an anachronistic
analysis that measures and filters historical experience through the lens of modern judgment and
purpose. But the I.33 manuscript stands as an important piece of contrary evidence, as do the
existence of similar practice venues existing in Spain (and probably elsewhere, but further
research is needed). The principles governing the technical dynamics of the single-handed sword
and buckler seem to have collected over time into elements of folk wisdom, and these elements
were further encoded, eventually, in an oral verse mnemonic which was, fortunately, recorded at
least partially as part of the anonymous author’s attempt to explain it in the I.33 treatise.

What we have in the I.33 treatise is a new window into how “those who worked” and
“those who prayed” handled their own personal defense. We see an image of a medieval martial
art practiced by “civilian” combatants, rather than those who wielded arms as a profession.
Accordingly, the I.33 treatise emphasizes caution, distance, and safety, unlike the military
treatises of dei Liberi and Liechtenauer, which emphasis the seizure of initiative. In a sense, the
I.33 treatise is a fencing treatise, its civilian, defensive character assuming a narrow band of
martial encounter, that is, one governed with a single antagonist and with room for the encounter
to develop. Notwithstanding, the similar weapon dynamics of the double-edged, cross-hilted,
counter-weighted, pointed, single-handed sword are nearly identical to similar weapons shown in
dei Liberi and in Liechtenauer, so these common dynamics recognize similar principles.

First, the author immediately recognizes the art of combat, which he terms the *artem
dimicatorum*, by which he evokes the concept that the martial art is bounded by principles that
govern the art, and that understanding these principles yields an important advantage over those
who don’t. This implies of course that at least some combatants did not know the art, relying
instead on their instincts, strength or speed. Experience, by contrast, as Cicero and Aristotle both
reminded us, can yield important insights into particulars, enabling great skill. It is this experience, this aggregate of particulars, which make up the *artem dimicatorum* recorded in the oral mnemonic and glossed by our anonymous author. In fact, our author extends the *artem dimicatorum* with his own extensions and interpretation, very likely a common phenomenon throughout the period just as it is in today’s martial art communities. Thus, we find expressed a clear *Principle of Art*, where individual creativity is bounded by principles rooted in the dynamic capabilities of governing technology—in this case hand weapons.

Technically, the combat was bounded by certain guards—*custodiae*—just as Liechtenauer identified four and dei Liberi twelve. The I.33 author identified seven “core” guards recognized as common to “all common fighters,” to which the author added several of his own. As in the German and Italian treatises, combat progressed through these seven guards, each well anchored to kinesthetic points of strength for the delivery of maximum power. A blow or a thrust began in a guard and ended in one, just as Aristotle’s conception of time and motion dictated that they should—all lines starting and ending at a point. Further, all guards have strengths and weaknesses, and they may be “broken” if the opponent selects one that counters it. Thus, the *Principle of Guards* suggests that the combatant may simplify the mental calculus necessary to understand the subtleties of time and position through the model of a set of guards, which all three of the systems surveyed advance. He creates a tactical decision tree, governed not by hard logic, but by feel, probability assessment, and creativity. This structure defines the medieval martial arts of Europe.

Looking deeper into the art, we find that the *Principle of Control*, with the first concern of safety, expressed in the imperative to gain control over the opponent’s sword using the combatant’s own sword. This principle of control remains a central tenet of the European martial
art as it was expressed by Hanko Döbringer and Fiore dei Liberi. This implies, as a cardinal virtue, the idea of safety, of maintaining and managing distance in order to preserve both freedom of action and time. In this case, the Principle of Control was expressed in the main tactic, gaining the sword and then transferring control to the buckler. Many follow-on options were then explored.

Further, we find expressed the Principle of Power, which seeks to preserve power and freedom of action, keeping the weapon close to the body where it can be anchored and potential energy stored. This was followed by an explosive exploitation of an opening based on a comparison of guards, but at no time do the figures in I.33 throw their balance to the wind, and their wide, centered stance is exceptionally stable, anchoring the combatants to the ground and enabling the development of considerable power.

The above principles interact in a way designed to preserve freedom of action for the combatant. This is what I call the Principle of Maneuver, the essential element in creative thought, which seeks to reduce the opponent’s options while still preserving maximum freedom of choice for as long as possible. In the case of I.33, combatants morphed between guards seeking an opportunity, but at a distance sufficient that they could leave if they chose. Once the combatant had gained the sword, this freedom of action was maximized as many “follow on” or “finishing” options remained available—it was thus a matter of probability assessment and desire to select one.

Another concept, the Principle of Binding, evident in the crossing of the swords, or in the incrosa, was expressed in I.33 in the follow-on options followed from the bind. This principle mirrors the one expressed in Sun-Tzu, where one is admonished to drive through a weak defense and flow around a strong one. In I.33, the Priest transferred control of the opponent’s sword to
his buckler, bound his arms, or struck with the buckler itself, using a flowing blend of throws, grips, strikes and disarms.

Lastly, the *Principle of Initiative* was expressed both explicitly and implicitly within the text. Acting first, or quickly to an opponent who has acted first, can be a critical component of ending a mortal encounter quickly on one superior terms. While the author of the I.33 treatise did not necessarily advocate striking first, once the swords were bound immediate action was crucial, as we saw expressed in Fiore’s use of the term *subito* and in Döbringer’s use of the terms *indes*, *vor* and *nach*.

These principles interact and are interlocking, governed by the creativity, will and knowledge of the combatant. I.33 thus represents the first known attempt to capture an organized approach to weapons-use in Europe, gathering the amorphous stuff of popular practice and preserving it in the more permanent medium of vellum and ink. We find in RA MS I.33 that men whose professional was not necessarily one of arms could nonetheless be trained experts in the use of personal arms through the martial art expressed with the sword and buckler. These men, acting in what were predominantly local societies, probably enjoyed the benefits that a reputation for skill-at-arms conveyed, parallel to the knightly conception of renown. Additionally, the use in arms may have conveyed a sense of individual will and importance, especially as these qualities were woven throughout the expression of the combat as an art in the Aristotelian sense, where individual creativity, valor and will were valued. This may have had some influence on the rising idea of individualism within Europe, or it could have been an expression of it. Certainly we learn that the knightly classes did not possess a monopoly on the skilled use of arms, at least at the dawn of the fourteenth century.
Hanko Döbringer

The 1389 *merkeverse* or oral teaching verse glossed by Döbringer, famously attributed to Johannes Liechtenauer, became dominant in Germany for nearly three hundred years. Döbringer’s text, the closest in time to Liechtenauer himself, was a clear expression of a military art, one that emphasized the need for power, control and efficiency. After Döbringer, during the course of the fifteenth century, the German martial arts—like their Italian counterparts—became increasingly divorced from the battlefield, and so became more focused on specific types of martial encounters, such as were found within the duel. But Döbringer’s gloss preserves the military origins of the *kunst des fechten*, and it expresses the same principles found in Fiore dei Liberi’s treatises that date from 1409 – 1420. Together, they capture something of the military martial art which would have been recognizable, with significant local variation, all over Europe, from northern Scotland to southern Italy, from Spain to Eastern Europe.

Like the anonymous author of the I.33 treatise, Döbringer asserts that Liechtenauer did not invent the art, but that it had existed for “hundreds of years,” but that the master had traveled widely to learn its length and breadth, capturing the “whole” art in his cryptic oral teaching verse. This verse could also have been, like the I.33 kernel source, created from an older tradition, and there is evidence for this.

The *Principle of Art* is clearly expressed. *Kunst* means art or school, and like the other two systems surveyed here, Döbringer emphasizes the flexibility and creativity expected of a successful combatant. Rigidity is expressly discouraged; Döbringer presents options for ways to solve tactical problems, rather than prescriptions. The term *kunst* or art is found throughout the text, as it is in the I.33 treatise and in Fiore’s *arte d’armizare*. The central tenet of individual will, creativity and knowledge is emphasized, especially when discussing the critical mental
aspects of the fight, in talking about the *vor, nach* and of *indes*—and, Döbringer is the only one to provide this kind of detail on what I believe to be the most important combat principle. The essential blend of knowledge, initiative, will and creativity builds in a profound sense of flexibility that allows the specifics to change greatly—as happens in any sustained conflict—but these changes can be smoothly met with new solutions based on governing principles.

Liechtenauer, like Fiore and the author of the I.33 treatise, anchors his art by using just four *leger*, guards or fighting positions, although they can be adopted on either side, yielding eight or more. But this use of a model of guards, remedies and counter-remedies also characterizes the medieval martial arts of Europe, and it provides an efficient model enabling very fast analysis of an opponent’s capabilities, resulting in quicker decisions for an effective solution, based on a learned probability assessment.

The *Principle of Measure*, is governed similarly; Liechtenauer recognizes three classes of distance, close, middle and far, and these parameters also carry their own suggestions to the combat model. Thus, Liechtenauer too works within the *Principle of Guards*, an idea that carries long after the ebbing of the medieval martial arts and into the Renaissance. Measure is expressed explicitly in Fiore with the *zogho largo*, “wide play,” and the *zogho stretto*, “close play,” which are relative and dependent upon the ranges of the weapons in play at the time. In the German school the principle is less well defined, although later authors distinguish close play as the *krieg* or war, a tacit recognition, perhaps, that things get really interesting in close, because there is simultaneously less time, are more targets available, and more weapons may be brought to bear.

Like our other two masters, Liechtenauer/Döbringer emphasizes control over the opponent’s weapon, and if the range closes, extending that control to the opponent’s body. This *Principle of Control* is imperative, as we see in Fiore, but in both of the “military” masters it is a
much greater priority than it seems to be in I.33, where the combatants may spend more time at wide distance, perhaps hoping to end the encounter without an engagement at all. Here, the combatant is urged to “rush in,” seizing the initiative and establishing control immediately, never relinquishing it. The way that this control is established may seem on the face of it to be different, with Liechtenauer suggesting strikes from side to side in order to force the opponent to make cover, thereby being unable to attack himself. In Fiore, the idea is to establish control on the blade through the fastest possible (subito) decision, driving to an immediate solution based on the nature of the incrosa.

Unlike in I.33, Liechtenauer is clear about the need to maximize power. While the I.33 figures do anchor their swords at the hip or shoulder, establishing potential energy, Döbringer is explicit in calling for the need for power driven to a precise point in the opponent’s defense, where he will be weakest; students of modern German methods of warfare will perhaps recognize this as a possible precursor to the idea of the schwerpunkt. The emphasis on power is more clearly expressed in Döbringer than in any other treatise, although it is present as subtext in Fiore as well, our other military author. Importantly, the precision the applied focus of the power is crucial; neither system advocates randomly and inefficiently bashing. This Principle of Power is one that, as noted above, falls away during the Renaissance in both German and Italian martial traditions, but it is crucially important during the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.

Döbringer/Liechtenauer is also the most explicit in terms of the importance of maneuver, but his use of flowing movement—frequens motens—is different than the more direct expression of the Principle of Maneuver found in Fiore. But it is clear that the lighter, toe-balanced position shown in I.33 may well exemplify the principle as well. The idea behind the Principle of Maneuver is to strike at unexpected times and places, reducing the opponent’s stability, and thus
his center of power. Döbringer counsels this be done using many small steps, punctuated with an occasional explosive jumps, something not found in either Fiore or I.33. Presumably this sense of *frequens motens* applies also to blended transitions between the *leger* or guards, giving the opponent nothing solid to key on, mentally or physically, but this is not explicit in the text.

But like Fiore and I.33, the *Principle of Binding* is clearly illuminated with Döbringer’s extensive discussion of *binden*. All three masters secure control over the opponent through his primary weapon—at wide distance, this is the weapon itself, while in close it is generally his body, controlled the through his arm. Fiore seeks the *incrosa*, our anonymous author of the I.33 treatise seeks the *ligans*—the reader may recall the I.33 verse: *Ligans ligati contrarij sunti & irati*, “the one who binds and the one who is bound are contrary and irate.” The bind is sought in nearly every instance, serving the *Principle of Control*.

Once bound, all three systems resolve the bind by following on, or finishing. Liechtenauer does this first by using the principle of strong versus weak, admonishing the combatant to drive through a weak guard and go around a strong one. This is precisely the formula that Fiore uses, expressed through his *tre volte*, the three turns. Even in I.33, the first solution is the easiest—*ligatus fugit ad partes laterum; peto sequi*—“the one who is bound flees to the side, I seek to pursue,” if cryptically said. The sub-principle could be expressed as the *Principle of Turning*, or the *Principle of Strong versus Weak*. But in any case, once the weapons are bound, however briefly, the full menu of follow-on options presents itself, from extending control by seizing the opponent’s weapon or even his person, striking him, disarming him, breaking a joint or limb, throwing him. These are Fiore’s “five things,” the *cinque cose*, a succinct encapsulation of the many options surveyed in the all three treatises. The primary tactic
suggested by the *Principle of Binding* thus becomes, seize control over the opponent’s weapon, then finish as appropriate. This satisfies also the *Principles of Control, Maneuver and Initiative*.

This leads us, finally, to the *Principle of Initiative*. Again, Döbringer is satisfyingly thorough, discussing nuances of the nature of the *vor*, the “before,” the *nach*, “after,” and *indes*, which has no direct translation but which might usefully be thought of as “immediacy,” similar to Fiore’s pregnant use of the word *subito*. Döbringer spends much of his available space emphasizing the need to secure and maintain the initiative, including instances when the combatant strikes first—in the *vor*—and how to immediately (*indes*) retrieve the lost initiative when the opponent strikes first—the *nach*. Fiore has the same concern, but sadly his expressions of the principle are expressed only implicitly as subtext.

Hanko Döbringer’s gloss on Liechtenauer’s verse may be the most important medieval treatise to survive in the German tradition, because it articulates, like no other text before or after it, the nuanced and critical elements of the fighting mind. Fiore touches on this in the *segno*, and the ideas are included in his work as subtext, but his camouflage, intentional or not, makes his mental approach to combat more difficult to assess. In Döbringer, however, there is little ambiguity apart from the difficult translation, and we are fortunate indeed to have such clarity expressed.

Recalling that Döbringer claimed Liechtenauer traveled far to collate the “length and breadth” of the *kunst des fechten* from its many knightly practitioners, he has preserved for the modern student of medieval military history, culture or ideas a unique image of the fighting mind and techniques as they were probably practiced throughout Europe. Detail at this level of granularity is unavailable in the romances, in the account books, or even in the knightly handbooks. The principles of combat, of the medieval martial arts, were probably harnessed to
some extent in the tactical approaches to battle, and perhaps to conflict in general. By studying
the *kunst des fechten* in general, and Döbringer in particular, we can perhaps gain a unique
insight into the tactical mind of the military man of the middle ages.

Fiore dei Liberi

Our second military master, Fiore dei Liberi, powerfully expresses the physical and
tactical aspects of his *arte d’armizare*, although much is expressed as subtext. The survival of at
least four of his treatises offers an unprecedented opportunity for comparison, and we can see a
development of his growth as a teacher, as a theorist and as a martial artist. With figures and
accessible text, we have realistic depictions of technical examples which Fiore used to express
the now-familiar principles that governed the martial arts of medieval Europe, bounded as they
were by the technological framework of metallurgy and shock weapons, but processed through
the agency of human judgment and culture. Fiore’s work is reflective of the combat arts as
practiced by the best of the professional warrior orders of the day; we know some of the
*condottieri* who Fiore trained, and we know that he achieved the notice of the Marquis d’Este,
Niccolò III.

Like our other authors, Fiore clearly adhered and clearly articulated his *arte d’armizare*,
literally the “art of the use of arms.” He started in the PD manuscript with the seemingly
independent arts of grappling, dagger, sword and polearm, and by the time of the Getty
manuscript, integrating them into an efficient whole. Like the others, however, his *arte*
emphasized the creative use of solutions based on judgment, expressed with the animal at the top
of his *segno* illustration, the lynx, who carried a compass for judgment and measure, and whose
“keen eyesight” missed nothing. It is in Fiore where we can best see the integrated nature of the
medieval martial arts, how one principle—expressed through a technique—transfers across the spectrum of weapons. Fiore is always implicit, and sometimes explicit in his assertion that this is so. His *arte d’armizare* thus presents us with a unique opportunity to peer inside the potential for the martial arts of the period, and in so doing we may well be struck with the efficiency, structure and cohesion.

Just as the *cervino* or lynx sits atop the *segno*, the place of honor in Renaissance art, so Fiore most clearly distinguishes the *Principle of Measure* in his work, breaking distance down into the “wide” or weapons-distance, the *zogho largo*, and the much more dangerous, “close” or grappling distance, the *zogho stretto*. Fiore elected to begin his fights—and to resolve them—at the widest possible distance, which preserves safety, also expressed as the *Principle of Guards* (or cover). Fiore expresses this concept with all his weapon-groups, and he offers similar solutions throughout the system that are portable from one circumstance to another. In this he is truly principle-based, frequently referring the student to other sections of the manuscript to see possibilities already expressed with other weapons.

Like the other masters, Fiore begins his tactical model with a set of *poste* or *guardie*, from which and through which all motions begin, transit, or end. This framework is further simplified as the student realizes that the guards are duplicated on the right and left, save for a restriction against crossing the wrists, because it violates the principle of power and stability, or *stabilitás*, as it is expressed by Fiore. Consequent with the *Principle of Guards* is the necessity to always strike from under cover, such that the combatant maximizes his safety and leaves as little to chance as possible. Fiore is adamant on this point, and never in the manuscript does he illustrate a strike without first establishing safety—either through cover or through the stronger control with a grip against the man or his weapon.
Also like the other two masters, Fiore establishes the *Principle of Control*, but he seeks control almost to the point of fetish. Fiore expresses it on the *segno* through the symbolism of the lion, who, holding the heart, stands for courage and, the reader may recall, is celebrated in a special poem at the end of the second prologue of the PD manuscript. Always, Fiore drives into the attack, not blocking but counter-attacking an incoming weapon, seeking always to maximize his control through contact, or better, through a *presa* or grip against the weapon or his opponent. Once he has this control, he offers his menu of finishing options, expressed in the *cinque cose*. It would be a very un-Fiorean fight to stand back and trade blows with an opponent. Instead, the picture of driving straight into the teeth of an attack, blunting or redirecting it using a *rebattendo* or *redoppiando*, compressing time and blunting both the opponent’s ability to generate power and to act within his decision cycle. Driving into the attack and brutally ending the assault quickly, is, to Fiore’s mind, the safest way to address an attack. It epitomizes the chivalric ethos, as well, which prized courage and valor. His *condottieri* students, “had no cause to be dissatisfied with my teaching,” as he bragged.

The *Principle of Power* was, as it was with our other military master, a prerequisite for Fiore, although it was articulated as subtext rather than with the convenient explicitness of Döbringer. Fiore’s figures all anchor the weapon at the power points on the body, at the hip or shoulder, and the figures are well-turned, using the body’s large muscle groups to create substantial potential energy before explosively unleashing it in the drive into the opponent’s territory. Power, for Fiore, was derived from the earth; the elephant, standing at the base of the *segno* illustration, was *fortudio*, epitomized this quality, connecting the earth with the concept of *stabilità*, where all power originated. Fiore’s later combatants fight from their hips, keeping their guards and hands low, anchoring the combatant to the ground. Compare this to the German
system, where the hands are often found high above the shoulders or even the head; for the Germans, potential energy was achieved by raising the sword high and harnessing gravity in many strikes, whereas Fiore scooped up energy from the ground and hurled it at the opponent and his weapon. Both sought to drive their opponents aggressively to the ground—the Germans from “high to low”; Fiore from “low to low.” Power was not as crucial (but nor was it ignored) in the I.33 treatise, probably because less power was needed, and as with the Renaissance treatises, when speed was the most important characteristic—as it was with the rapier—then power may profitably be traded for speed. Guards drift forward, as they do even in Filippo Vadi’s text of 1480, until we have the extreme expression of the principle shown with Salvatore Fabris, where the figures lean as far forward as possible, their rapiers extended far forward, their back-ends thrust backwards to counter-balance them. In the medieval martial arts this makes no sense, as a blow delivered without sufficient power is wasteful.

By contrast, Fiore de-emphasizes, but does not jettison, the Principle of Maneuver. In driving directly in against the opponent, he does little maneuvering in preparation, although one or two poste transitions could be done before driving in. The case of multiple opponents, which neither Fiore nor Döbringer discuss, would likely have been played differently, with the maneuver being directed managing the distance with each opponent until a vulnerability could be found, and using the opponents against each other as cover (the Principle of Guards). But it is the German system which suggests use of the frequens motens; at the same time, Döbringer suggests that one should drive forward “like a taught string,” directly for the critical opening. Where Fiore expresses his sense of maneuver, of keeping the opponent off-balance, is in his weapon selection. Rather than relying solely on the blade, or the point, Fiore demonstrates fluid movement towards the closest effective weapon resulting from an encounter, which could be the
blade, or it could be the pommel, the left hand, the foot, head, or anything else conveniently at hand. He is quick to turn the weapon about the opponent’s cover, using pommel or blade, or either side of the blade—the true or false edges—choosing to strike with the closest, effective improvised weapon. This turns the opponent’s focus on the combatant’s primary weapon against him, keeping him off balance, and it is fast, preserving operational tempo and driving inside of the opponent’s decision-cycle.

Fiore often uses the terms *subito* or *prestamente* to underscore the “need for speed” in following on or finishing with a technique following the *incrosa*. The Principle of Initiative is thus shown on the *segno* with the tiger, who attacks “like lightening,” capturing the initiative. His selection of the appropriate finish seems to be often dependent upon the fastest, effective choice from amongst the wide possibilities within the *cinque cose*, but his sense of seizing the initiative is at base not different than Döbringer’s—he drives in first, using the First Master of Battle, once he has achieved a positional advantage through a quick *poste* transition. This is parallel with the German concept of *vor*. Or, if the opponent strikes first, he attacks into the weapon, from the front with a *rebattendo* or from the back using the Second Master of Battle with a *redoppiando*, depending upon the relative positions and energy states of the combatants. This is equivalent to the many responses to being in the *Nach* found in Liechtenauer’s verse, and in both cases, they must be executed as close to immediately as possible, *indes* in the German; *subito* or *prestamente* in the Italian.

In all, Fiore presents a coherent expression of the medieval martial arts in its most sophisticated, integrated form. It is likely that few combatants had as sophisticated an understanding of the underlying principles as Fiore did, at least near the end of his life, but through his text we can see how the underlying principles of the martial arts could be expressed...
in the technological framework, creatively interpreted through human agency to meet new challenges. Like the other masters, Fiore emphasized not “school solutions” but possibilities open to his students, and to all students of the *arte d’armizare*. The built-in flexibility reflects the chivalric culture of the era, where individual performance was a function of a growing value on the human being as an individual, the idea that became, over the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, expressed as the Humanism that drove the Renaissance, and through it, the dramatic expansion in knowledge and power that would characterize European culture until the early twentieth century.

Medieval Martial Arts: Principles, Definitions, Meaning

By now, we have seen multiple expressions of categories I have identified that characterize the martial arts of medieval Europe. All of the arts surveyed here, and others not included for reasons of brevity, seem to share the principles listed below. We have now distilled the *Principle of Art* (creative tactical problem solving based on mastery of principles), the *Imperative Principles of Control* and *Initiative* (as a tactical objective; initiative), the *Principle of Power* (unique to the medieval arts), the *Principle of Measure* (judgment and distance), the *Principle of Guards* (fighting under cover, counters, combat modeling), the *Principle of Binding* (control through contact), and the *Principle of Maneuver* (unbalancing the opponent, following-on after contact).

The principles show individual, regional, temporal and cultural variation. For example, Liechtenauer’s system, as expressed in Döbringer, advocated direct, powerful strikes. Later German masters, still following his tradition, de-emphasized power in favor of speed, striking more from the wrists. Filippo Vadi expressed his art similarly, taking Fiore’s form but trading
power for speed. Fiore’s method of generating power was different than Liechtenauer’s, as he went from “low to low” in developing his cornerstone hammering motion to drive across the center of the fight, while Liechtenauer favored guards held above the head, raining blows down from “high to low,” preferring to draw power assisted by gravity. Power was essential in both medieval cases, owing to the demands of medieval technological parameters.

All known medieval combat systems adhere to the principles above. In the fifteenth century Burgundian Jeu de la Hache, one can see every principle expressed—the combat begins and ends in known guards, uses binds to secure and extend control, seeks to restrict the opponent’s ability to maneuver while preserving the “expert” axe-player’s own. In short, the manuscript is a familiar expression of these principles.

In recalling anthropologist David E. Jones’ “syndrome-type” descriptions introduced in chapter 2,2 we can see that the artem dimicatorum, the kunst des fechten, and the arte d’armizare are indisputably martial arts:

- **Kata:** The European arts use “pre-arranged…activity in which the basic techniques of a certain fighting style are acted out….” In the European sense this activity is less structured than in the known Asian systems, but plays—zoghi—are employed as an exemplary teaching tool.

- **Emphasis on Shock Combat:** “Martial Arts stress hand to hand combat…” The European arts emphasize the use of grappling, the dagger, sword, staff, buckler, and polearms—all shock weapons.

- **Ritual:** “…a repeated, highly stylized behavior…. ” Owing to their emphasis on individual creativity and expression, this is reduced in European martial arts, but may be see in the tradition of a salute and in the invocations that took place before tournaments and individual contests.

- **Techniques, repetition, and drill:** “…continual practice of basic techniques…. ” We know little about how European knights and students of the civilian arts conducted their practice, but Döbringer himself wrote about the need for practice, as did Geoffrey de Charny and the fourteenth century King of Portugal, Dom Duarte. There

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is additional evidence in a few paintings and illuminations, suggesting that young men exercised themselves broadly and practiced with weapons. Whether Europeans drilled or not, prior to the late fifteenth century, is unknown.

- Sparring: A “...transition between the formal practice of fighting techniques and true battlefield conditions.” Europeans clearly demonstrate this, as it dovetails with the idea expressed by John of Salisbury that principles must be exercised to have meaning. From fighting in Iberian monasteries—also shown in I.33—to the schulfechten / ernstfechten distinction made by Döbringer, to the feats of arms that included the challenges, jousts and tournaments discussed by Geoffrey de Charny and celebrated in Froissart, learning by doing was a cornerstone of the European martial arts, where combatants “trained as they fought.”

- Entertainment: “…the entertainment component of martial arts has long been in evidence in the ‘folk operas’ of China…and in contemporary television series.” Spectators gathered to watch medieval battles, but more gathered to watch tournaments and many participated in the civic contests found throughout the low countries and in Italy.

- Seeking Internal Power: “Most martial arts have an intrinsic component…a belief that can shape an even stronger, healthier, faster, and more perceptive fighter.” Fiore’s segno epitomizes this belief: the lion is stronger, the tiger faster, the lynx more perceptive, and the elephant better grounded. More broadly, the internal power is thought of as will in the medieval context, expressed eloquently by Dom Duarte.

- Ranking and Indications of Rank: “In some cases based on seniority and in others…on blatant fighting prowess.” European chivalric society characterizes the latter, as one would expect where “place” was becoming less important than capability (again, witness William Marshal). Within the treatises, especially in Fiore, the master teaches his students, who in turn teach other players. We see this also in the master-student-other relationship within the German treatises.

- Connection with Social Elites: “The upper classes in all societies have tended to be skillful fighters and military leaders.” Certainly this is true in Europe; we have two “military” masters surveyed here in the works of Johannes Liechtenauer and Fiore dei Liberi. In the prologues of both masters, great care is taken to connect their work with the larger body of chivalric tradition, imploring appropriate use of martial prowess expected of a noble. But the European case, like the Japanese one (where the peasant form of Karate was eventually accepted into the family of the elite Japanese martial arts), spawned a martial art of the laboring orders, which, as these orders rose in social status with the commercial revolution, tended to adopt characteristics of noble prestige, including combat. We see this in the federfechter and marxbrüder fechtschules, which attracted rising commercial men such as fishmongers and goldsmiths during the course of the late fifteenth and into the sixteenth century. The same was true for the fighting schools of London, Paris and Bologna, amongst others.
In presenting his descriptive definition, Jones wrote, “As with all syndrome-type descriptions, not all of the foregoing elements must be present to identify a martial art, but when a majority are present, a martial art is being observed.”3 In our case, all of the elements are present, and so according to a widely accepted anthropological definition, we have surveyed the martial arts of medieval Europe.

In discussing the martial arts, anthropologists have tended to use the term “art” to connect martial activities into the expressive elements of culture we commonly think of arts, especially performance and dance. They think of martial arts as markers of sociocultural identity, more than as functional expressions of combat training. This is a valuable perspective, but in the case of medieval Europe, the use of the term art has a deeper and more important meaning. We have seen already that, in its historical and philosophical context, “art” meant the mastery of fundamental, governing principles that conveyed significant benefits in exchange for the long study required. The ability to flexibly solve new tactical problems, leveraging principles of the artem dimicatorum, the kunst des fechten or the arte d’armizare, offered an important advantage in combat, which could mean dramatic changes in prestige won through public reputation. This follows the development of the term “art” from Aristotle through Cicero and John of Salisbury, and the idea permeated European philosophical thinking.

Because European culture was much less caste-bound than were other warrior cultures, flexibility within the system was emphasized. There is as much “art” in the mix as “martial,” but not in the sense of expressive dance. Art was intended as a combat enabler, a critical component of mental flexibility which, while hardly universal, enabled students of the martial arts critical mental advantages that translated directly into physical and temporal advantages.

3 Ibid., xii.
This idea of the importance of principle over form is one of the distinguishing characteristics defining the martial arts of medieval Europe. The European masters emphasize *zoghi*—ludic play—students are encouraged to freely innovate within the bounds of principle instead of adhering to a “perfect” ideal form set by the master. Instead, the power of human creativity is emphasized, utilizing and exercising the power of will and free choice.

Considerations of Technology, Culture and War

The parameters of the European principles are also partially defined by the dynamic characteristics of the dominant technology. In this case, the gating technology was the use of high-quality steel for both offense and defense, expressed through shock-weapons. By the fourteenth century, armour technology had advanced with sophisticated mixed materials, blending the benefits of absorption using cloth, wool and leather; hard-shell resistance using iron or hardened steel; and deflection or ablation using compound curving surfaces. Even an unarmoured man was to some degree armoured, in that the clothing of the time, with its layers of linen and wool, provided some defense against an edge. Because of this, the ability to cut was not as important as the ability to crush; hence, in the Italian we find the verb *colpire*，“to strike” favored over *tagliare*, “to cut.” But even the greatest shock-weapon power would prove useless unless applied to the precise points in the man’s defense where his armour was weak, hence the emphasis in Fiore in particular with precise finishing actions that drove an opponent to the ground or secured him in a *presa*. This also explains the emphasis on the near-constant maintenance of potential energy, with weapons well-anchored to the power connection points on the body at the hip and shoulder.

While such physical aspects of the technological base may appear determinant, the
appropriate use of technology, as well as its development, is a cultural function. Thus, little had changed in the technological capabilities during the course of the fifteenth century, the increasing use of gunpowder notwithstanding. Gunpowder did not drive the immediate changes in why combat was engaged in. Cultural changes, in particular the changing relationship between the rural, manorial, and legal environment increasingly drove violence beyond the legal sphere into the realm of the extra-legal duel, where further cultural changes ensured an increasing amount of social conflict. It is out of this increasingly urban culture that the new schools of fence arose, including the great schools of Bologna, Spain and Germany.

Certainly, changes in technology affected the battlefield, reducing the effectiveness of armour. But the adoption of gunpowder was not solely a function of capability—the Chinese and the Turks also possessed it. Cultural imperatives drove the European use of it on the battlefield, and it is just possible that the readiness of Europe to adopt such a revolutionary technology could have had something to do with the long-building emphasis on individual initiative, will and value we see culminated in the Renaissance idea of Humanism. These tenets of individual worth are to a degree rooted or at least expressed in the right of self-defense, in the conception of the individual as a valuable component of the community in his own right. Perhaps there is an important Humanist thread to be found in the expression of the martial arts of medieval Europe, as the chivalric ideas of renown won through demonstrated valor and skill blended with the material commercialism of the cities, resulting in a new iteration of the culture where birthright was less important than capability. The shedding of caste had long before begun with such exemplars as William Marshal, who rose from son of a minor knight to the most powerful man in England, chiefly through the renown and prestige won within the tournament lists and on the battlefield.
Conclusion

For three centuries, historians of the “science” of fencing have promulgated the idea that medieval fighting systems were “rough and untutored,” the desperate result of a lack of understanding of the principles governing of shock weapon combat. Relying on heavy armour, the old assertion goes, there was little need for the science of arms to develop. But while other aspects of neglect during the Middle Ages have largely been overturned, the idea of parallel sophistication in the personal combat of knights, men-at-arms, and the generalis or common man has not gained traction amongst scholars, despite considerable efforts by enthusiast practitioners.

Europe’s long tradition of martial arts thrived from at least the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries, and probably much earlier, encoded in mnemonic verse. It was passed from generation to generation long before being recorded in writing starting at the dawn of the thirteenth century, but during the course of the course of the whole of the fourteenth century and into the fifteenth, the subtle principles of the European martial arts were encoded in sophisticated systems known variously as Johannes Liechtenauer’s *kunst des fechten*, Fiore dei Liberi’s *arte d’armizare*, and the anonymous *artem dimicatorum*. The fighting treatises that preserved these systems have been passed down to us largely unknown, considered mere curiosities by antiquarians and historians of fencing.

We saw, however, that the Aristotelian conception of *arte* was a sophisticated understanding of governing principle, and that once understood, these principles could be creatively applied to new problems in order to preserve maximum capability and flexibility. We saw how this conception was passed through Cicero and the Arab scholars to the newly awakening Europe of the Scholastics, and how Scholastics such as John of Salisbury ensured the currency of this conception of principle mastery in the learned culture of Europe. We saw further
how these ideas were injected into the primary education system through translations of Ciceronian materials. Combined, these methods of transmission ensured that Aristotle’s conception of arte was widely understood when the fighting treatises were written, from c. 1295 – 1420. In the fighting treatises themselves, we saw how this conception of arte was applied to the study of arms,

In the case of the anonymous RA MS I.33 manuscript, the priest and his scholar-students glossed an older oral mnemonic tradition, adding depth but also illuminating something of how the “common” man or generalis was expected to fight. This “kernel” verse is both enigmatic and interesting, because it suggests a long previous history for the preservation and transmission of combat principles in oral verse. In I.33 we find the first expression of principles that remain common to the European martial arts, including the principles of imperative control, measure, binding, and maneuver. The Priest sought to preserve his own safety, and the safety of his students, by starting at wide distance and by governing his movements through a known series of custodiae, or guards. Movement was made as a transition between the guards. He then sought to achieve control through a bind of the weapons, after which many creative finishing options were presented, depending upon the nature of the bind. Curiously, we saw, through corroborating visitation records, that such combat teaching may have been more widespread in monasteries, although future research will be needed to verify this.

In the hausbüch of Hanko Döbringer, the mnemonic zettel or merkeverse of Johannes Liechtenauer was recoded with extensive verse commentary. Liechtenauer himself became the father of Germanic martial arts for three centuries, but Döbringer’s work is unique amongst the many works in this tradition for its close temporal association with Liechtenauer himself and its exposition on the mental aspects of combat, depth which is not achieved in any other treatise.
Dating from 1389, this tactical exposition dates from the heart of the long Hundred Years’ War and the myriad adventures of the *condottieri* in Italy, and apart from the insight into personal combat, it may yield an avenue for understanding tactical thought by medieval knights and men-at-arms. Devoid of illustrations, Döbringer’s work has long been considered an ancillary curiosity, eclipsed amongst students of the Germanic sword arts by the far more accessible and visually appealing works of Hans Talhoffer, Paulus Kal, Sigmund Ringeck and a host of others. But these works date from considerably later, and within them we see a transition of the art of arms depicted to the more restricted sphere of *schulfechten*. Döbringer represents the closest link in the tradition to the military martial arts, emphasizing as he does direct lines of attack, power, and eschewing any flamboyance that does not have a tactical purpose. Like the anonymous work in I.33, Liechtenauer’s fight is made between *leger* or guards, and it adheres to the principles of maneuver (*frequens motens*), the principle of binding (*binden*), the principle of control (*vor, nach* and *indes*), and, as a military art, the principle of power, distinguishing it from those later arts, which instead emphasize time and speed, instead of power. Most importantly, the *kunst des fechten* or “art of fighting” adhered to the Aristotelian conception of an art, advancing principles in which the students were expected to freely innovate in the face of tactical challenge.

In Fiore dei Liberi’s *Fior di Battaglia*, in his *Flos Duellatorum*, in his *Arte Luctandi*, and in the incomplete Morgan work, we find this idea of unity of principle purely expressed. Principles expressed through techniques in the grappling or *daga* sections are recommended throughout the work with the sword, spear, and poleaxe, on foot and an hoseback, in and out of armour. Fiore, too, adheres to the principles of the European martial arts; first, expressed in the name of his art, the *arte d’armizare* and through the coherency of principle discussed at length above. He too adheres to the common principles governing the art of arms, although he collated
them in what may be a unique way, seeing perhaps more clearly than most how the principles common to all shock weapons could be generalized into a devastating and effective combat system.

We do not know the extent to which medieval knights, men-at-arms, the average generalis or the priest-in-arms followed the advice offered in the surviving treatises, but the authors of these treatises gathered the material for their syntheses from combatants of the day. These magistri or fechmeister taught their art—sometimes in secret—but they taught it sufficiently that it became well-known and even perhaps renown. Fiore managed to bring himself to the attention of Niccolò d’Este III, Marquis of Ferrara, and Pietro Monte after him served as master at the court alongside Baldassare Castiglione. It seems very likely that every technique preserved in the fighting treatises was known to the combatants of the day and, given the principle-based nature of the artem dimicatorum, the kunst des fechten and the arte d’armizare, that they would have formed the common experience of those who fought with hand weapons during the course of the Middle Ages and into the early Renaissance.

Fighting was the cornerstone activity of the martial orders of Europe, noble and non-noble. By understanding how men thought about fighting, we can learn a great deal about how they viewed their world, both in peace and in war, for the successful practice of martial arts is more than a merely physical activity. Mastery of the principles of the art requires mental dedication as well, a dedication we read about in the romances and chronicles that celebrated martial prowess. The works of Johannes Liechtenauer and Fiore dei Liberi expressly invoke chivalric literature in their prologues, dedicating their works to the most noble of “those who fought.”

While the nobility and gentry of northern Europe may have had a monopoly on the
expensive trappings of heavy cavalry, however, they did not possess a monopoly on combat skill. The first treatise, RA MS I.33, shows that “those who prayed” also sometimes dedicated themselves to mastery of martial principle, and these skills were also taught in major cities starting in at least the twelfth century, if not earlier, and so we know that “those who worked” were also initiated into the mysteries of arms.

Scholars interested in medieval warfare, the history of medieval ideas or chivalric culture will find a wealth of insight encoded in the fighting treatises. Those interested in monastic life may be shocked to learn that some of the brethren engaged in regular practice with sword and buckler within the cloister, evidenced by the unconcern of bishops on visitation. Those more focused on the culture of the generalis have a new window into what the common man might have known about defending himself, potentially an important thread in the long march towards the sense of personal empowerment and entitlement erupting in the peasant revolts and the bloody fights of the seventeenth century.

In a broader sense, the European martial arts are connected into cultural conceptions concerning the value of the individual, epitomized through his right to self-defense and expressed through the use of arms. As European society changed during and after the Renaissance, Humanist ideas symbiotically encouraged commercial and scientific change that catapulted Europeans onto the world stage for the first time since the fall of Rome. But the Renaissance spirit did not spring whole cloth from the writings of Leonardo Bruni, from Michael Angelo’s brushes, or from Donatello’s chisel. They lived too in the idea that a sovereign man could defend himself, and that even the violent conduct of combat was governed by principles which a man could profitably master to his own benefit. Over time, we will learn a great deal more about these treatises as a new awakening has been growing around them, and we are seeing
a new rebirth as these arts are painstakingly reconstructed according to Francesco Novati’s
appeal:

In order that the history of armed combat in the Middle Ages rest on a solid knowledge
base, an exploration of the ancient monuments [treatises] will be necessary, which many
researchers have started, but without an accurate method, it will be a long time before
these studies reach the necessary levels of efficiency. But this research will bring no gain
if those who study the theory and practice of the art of fencing fail to join their efforts
with those of historians and archaeologists. If there is one matter on which they have to
agree, it’s this: practitioners, historians and archaeologists will make mistakes if they
ignore each other, while they may easily avoid them working together.4

4 F. Novati, op. cit., 84.
APPENDIX

HISTORICAL AND MODERN PEDAGOGIES IN MEDIEVAL MARTIAL ARTS

Brian R. Price

Delivered at the 2009 Scientific Congress on Martial Arts & Combat Sports
Viseau, Portugal
While the Asian martial arts have secured their place within the popular and educational cultures of Western nations, it is only in the last decade that pioneering work has been done to uncover Europe’s nearly forgotten martial arts tradition. This tradition, documented in surviving “fight-books” dating from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries, has enjoyed a rebirth as new generations of scholars, interpreters and practitioners have begun the arduous but culturally rewarding task of reconstructing the fighting arts of Europe. Since 1998, following the release of John Clements’ _Medieval Swordsmanship_, reconstructing and resurrecting these historical arts has progressed rapidly, but has been hampered by the lack of methodological coherency.¹ This paper will essay an introduction to the medieval martial arts of Europe, outline key problems in their linguistic, physical and tactical translation, and present a proposed approach designed to accelerate the development of these arts in a modern framework of worldwide sport and martial activity.

Today we know of more than fifty of these fighting treatises, dating as early as the late thirteenth century, that detail potent systems of defense. Since rapier manuals from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century have been well analyzed by fencing historians, in this paper I will confine my commentary to the earlier forms which may be more practically termed “martial arts” due to their integrated blend of weapons and grappling technique.

The earliest of these treatises, Royal Armouries RA MS I.33, originates in the

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¹ Apart from early doctoral dissertations by Martin Wiershin in 1965 and by Peter-Hans Hils in 1985, early work on the European arts was pioneered by Matthew S. Galas, especially in his landmark article, “Kindred Spirits. The art of the sword in Germany and Japan,” _Journal of Asian Martial Arts_, VI (1997), pp. 20-46. Much unpublished research was conducted by Steve Hicks, and some of the Italian fencing schools such as _Nova Scrimia_ and Massimo Malipiero’s _Compagnia di Malipiero_, amongst others, worked with selected manuscripts. But it was not until the successful publication of Clements’ work, _Medieval Swordsmanship: Illustrated Methods and Techniques_, Boulder, CO: Paladin Press, 1998, that momentum was achieved. Clements’ books are extremely controversial and have been largely eclipsed by more developed interpretations, but his landmark contribution should not be discounted.
Württemberg region of Germany and dates from circa 1295. The treatise depicts a priest and a scholar engaged in sophisticated sword and buckler techniques organized logically around seven fighting positions, or “wards.” It is a gloss or explanatory text that cites an older verse whose origins are unknown. Interestingly, it is also the only known text that features a female combatant. Dr. Jeffrey L. Forgeng, conservator for the Higgens Armoury in Worcester, MA, has led the study of this treatise with an English edition and commentary, while interpretations by David Lindholm, Robert Holland, and Scott Brown, amongst others, have contributed practical interpretations that extend the treatise’s availability to the martial arts community as a whole.

RA MS I.33 stands as the first in a rich tradition of German treatises whose survival is a great boon for modern scholars. Much of the surviving German work follows the work of the enigmatic fechtmeister, Johannes Liechtenauer, who was active in Franconia from the middle of the fourteenth century. While Liechtenauer certainly taught in secret using an oral mnemonic verse known as zettel, successive generations of students produced fighting books based on the verse and glossed in considerable detail. What survives is a fascinating corpus of manuscripts all based on Liechtenauer’s verse for a period of more than two centuries.

The earliest surviving copy of Liechtenauer’s verse dates from 1389, and it appears in the hausbüch of the priest Hanko Döbringer. Following Döbringer are glosses by Sigmund Ringeck (c.1440, Dresden, State Library of Saxony, MS C487); an anonymous compendium known as the

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3 Ibid., plates 63-4, pp. 144-7.
4 Thus far the only published version of a RA MS I.33 interpretation remains the one by Paul Wagner and Stephen Hand, published as *Medieval Art of Sword and Shield: The Combat System of RA MS I.33*, Union City, CA: Chivalry Bookshelf, 2003.
6 For a good survey of known treatises see the above-mentioned *In Service of the Duke*, or Christian Henry Tobler, *Fighting with the German Longsword*, Highland Village, TX: Chivalry Bookshelf, 2004, pp. 2-4.
von Danzig (c. 1452, National Academy, Rome, Codex 44 A 8), Jud Lew (c.1450, Universitätssbibliothek Augsburg, codex I.6.4°.3); Paulus Kal (c.1480, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, CSG 1507); Hans Talhoffer (1443, 1459 and 1467; respectively Ducal Library of Gotha, Codex A nº 558; Königliche Bibliothek, Copenhagen, Thott 290 2º and Ducal Library of Gotha, Codex icon. 294a); Hans von Speyer (1491, Universitätssbibliothek Salzburg, MS I 29); and Joachim Meyer (1570, Strasbourg), amongst a few others. While some of these works have been published, a larger number remain unidentified and the genealogies between them must still be established. While the majority of surviving manuscripts are of German origin, a number of others should be noted.

First amongst these must be the surviving Italian manuscripts dating back to at least 1409 by Fiore dei Liberi (Morgan Pierpoint Library, New York, M.0383; Getty Library, Los Angeles, MS Ludwig 13 83.MR.183; Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, MS Latin 11269; and the fourth remains in the hands of the Pisani-Dossi family, Italy). Fiore’s work survives in four known manuscripts, and is sufficiently complete to have generated significant interest amongst practitioners. His work is the foundation for my own interpretation and for our martial arts practices.

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9 The earliest of these treatises is dated 1409 from the treatise’ prologue and was transcribed by Francesco Novati, *Flos duellatorum in armis, sine armis, equester, pedester: il Fior di battaglia : testo inedito del 1410*, Bergamo: Ist. Italiano d’Arti Grafiche, 1902. Recently this edition has seen numerous reissues in Italy, notably by Giovanni Rhapsardi, *Flos duellatorum in armis, sine armis equester et pedester*, Padova: Gladiatoria, 1998; by Marco Rubboli and Luca Cesari, *Flos duellatorum: manuale di arte del combattimento del XV. Secolo*, Rimini: Il
The Schola Saint George.\textsuperscript{10} Fillippo Vadi, writing in the 1470s, has left a single treatise.\textsuperscript{11} The remainder of the Italian “Bolognese” school, which includes Pietro Monte (1490),\textsuperscript{12} Achille Marozzo (1536),\textsuperscript{13} amongst others, have since the nineteenth century been seen as an important origin for classical and modern fencing.\textsuperscript{14} Outside of Italy, scattered treatises survive from Burgundy, England, Spain and Portugal. The Burgundian material, a single treatise entitled \textit{Jeu de la Hache} dating from the mid-fifteenth century, details work with the pole-axe.\textsuperscript{15} Several enigmatic Middle English verses deal with the two-handed sword.\textsuperscript{16} George Silver’s books from the sixteenth century may be considered medieval in form, if not in date.\textsuperscript{17} And of special interest to attendees of this conference must be

cercchio, 2002 ; and in the interpretation by Renzo Nostini, \textit{Flos dvellatorvm in armis, sine armis, eqvester, pedester: il fior di battaglia di maestro Fiore dei Liberi da Premariacco.} Pisa: Giardini, 1982. The only other published version has also been done in Italian by Massimo Malipero, an unequalled work published as \textit{Il fior di battaglia di Fiore dei Liberi da Cividale: il codice Ludwivg XV 13 del J. Paul Getty Museum}, Udine: Ribis, 2006. I have translated sections of the Getty treatise also in Brian R. Price, \textit{The Sword in Two Hands: A Full-Color Training Guide for the Medieval Longsword Based on Fiore dei Liberi’s Fior di Battaglia}, Highland Village, TX: Chivalry Bookshelf, 2008. Neither of the other two surviving manuscripts have yet been published, but the originals are in the Morgan Pierpoint Library, New York, accession number M.0383 (known as the “Morgan”) and in the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris, accession number MS Latin MS 11269 (only recently identified but now known as the “Florius”).

\textsuperscript{10} The Schola Saint George presents a structured curriculum based on Fiore’s art. Students may achieve recognition using a belt progression similar to that employed in more familiar Asian arts, although study for advanced students follows a more graduate-student model using directed study into specific areas of inquiry. The Schola Saint George has branches and study groups throughout the USA and in Europe.


\textsuperscript{11} Biblioteca Nazionale in Rome, Vittorio Emmanuele Collection codice 1324. It has been published in Italian by Marco Rubboli Marco and Luca Cesari as \textit{L’arte cavalleresca del combattimento}, Rimini: Il cercchio, 2005. It was also translated into English by Luca Porzio and Gregory Mele and published as \textit{Arte Gladiatoria Dimicandi: Fifteenth Century Swordsmanship of Master Fillippo Vadi}, Union City, CA: Chivalry Bookshelf 2002.


\textsuperscript{13} Achille Marozzo, \textit{Opera Nova: Chiamata duello, o vero fiore dell’armi de singulari abattimenti offensive et diffensivi}, Modena: 1536. While Marozzo’s work was also printed again in 1568, it has been republished recently in an Italian edition by Marco Rubboli and and Giovanni Rapisardi. \textit{Opera Nova dell’Arte delle Armi}, Padova: Gladiatoria, 1999.

\textsuperscript{14} The most complete and important works connecting the Italian tradition to classical fencing is by William M. Gaugler, \textit{The History of Fencing: Foundations of Modern European Swordplay}, Bangor, Maine: Laureate Press, 1998.


\textsuperscript{16} British Library MS Additional 39564 and British Museum MS. 3542, ff 82-85.

the unique jousting and horsemanship treatise of the Portuguese king, Dom Duarte, whose Livro Da Ensinança De Bem Cavalgar dates from the fifteenth century.\(^{18}\)

With few exceptions, these historical fight-masters instructed or claimed to instruct students in highly sophisticated methods of grappling combat employing joint locks, throws and ground-fighting; combat with and against a dagger; techniques using the sword in one hand alone and with a buckler, or in two hands; combat with pole-weapons such as the spear and pole-axe. Detailed expositions on technique accompany rich illustrations on foot and on horseback, in and out of armour.

Still other manuscripts not included in the list above are known from the fifteenth century, and doubtless there are more to be identified. This corpus of surviving treatises represents a rich vein of historical information that forms the backbone for today’s efforts at reconstruction. Professor Sydney Anglo’s cornerstone work, The Martial Arts of Renaissance Europe, provides foundation of historical analysis that focuses on the later rapier treatises of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but unfortunately fails to penetrate the veil of mnemonic difficulty to do justice to the medieval treatises.\(^{19}\) Such a foundation for the medieval martial arts is the subject of my own dissertation, currently in-progress at the University of North Texas.\(^{20}\)


\(^{20}\) Brian R. Price, Medieval Martial Arts: European fighting masters, their fight-books, techniques, and context in late Medieval and early Renaissance society, PhD Dissertation in progress, University of North Texas.
Medieval Martial Arts Texts as Mnemonics

Were these texts merely collections of technique, as is still believed by many fencing historians, the survival of these manuscripts would mean little to the community of modern martial arts practitioners. But as I am attempting to prove in my dissertation, these works represent the first written expression of a martial arts tradition extending back perhaps as far as the twelfth century or even earlier. As noted above, the first known treatises, dating from c. 1295, is a commentary on a teaching verse which is now lost. Similarly, the Liechtenauer tradition is built around commentary on the old fight-master’s zettel written in vernacular German, potentially an example of what Mary Carruthers has termed *inventione*, the preservation of knowledge meant to be accessed and used in an essentially creative process. Following Carruthers further, the distinctions between oral and written cultures which have been the subject of so much spilled ink amongst historians and literary critics is a spurious one, and during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries Europe witnessed an explosion of texts based on previously oral material, in religion, in the early sciences, and in the humanist movement. But medieval texts were, for Carruthers, not meant for strict memorization so much as to provide cues and guides for creative thinking on one’s feet, as expressed in Cicero’s influential *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. In this sense, we can see both the earlier oral verse and the recorded techniques as mnemonic guides for memory in an essential act of martial inventiveness that characterizes

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21 Ideas of “progress” from ancient practice to systematized modern practice has long led fencing historians and medieval warfare historians to overlook medieval practice. Classical fencing authors, such as William M. Gaugler, tend to begin with Achille Marozzo (1536), while modern sport fencers tend, following Egerton Castle, to characterize medieval fighting as devoid of technique, based solely on power, endurance, and the defensive qualities of armour.

European arts and which may distinguish it from its Asian correlates. The books are essentially mnemonic devices, memory-cues probably designed originally for students already versed in the martial arts they depict.

Linguistic, Technical and Tactical Translation

Because the arts are essentially encoded in remote historical sources, bringing them forward into the twenty-first century is exceedingly difficult. Very few students of these arts possess the historical, paleographic, philological, or kinesthetic knowledge necessary to conduct both linguistic and physical translations. Tactical translations are even more difficult.

Linguistic translations might seem, at first glance, to be fairly straightforward. While most of the surviving treatises contain illustrations, they also contain text. Most of the treatises are in the vernacular, fourteenth or fifteenth century variants in German, Italian, French, or English. Transcriptions must first be pulled from the original manuscripts, checked and rechecked for accuracy. This requires paleographic skills which are rare amongst modern academics, much less amongst interpreters. Additionally, much of the language itself is technical, employing terms which are unique or whose meanings have changed over time. Rendering an ancient text into a modern language is essentially an act of interpretation. Interpreters of the historical systems who do not have sufficient language ability are forced to rely on the translations of others, yielding a critical weakness. Worse still are translations by linguists with no experience in the physical arts described.

Physical translation of text and images into technique is also difficult. It must rely on the product of linguistic interpretation, and it must combine this with knowledge into medieval

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23 No evidence of forms-based or kata has yet surfaced for the medieval arts. Instead, the European systems seem to be based on collections of technical material broken down into “plays” (zoghi, in Fiore’s text) which the student could select based on circumstance.
iconography and illustration techniques in order to interpret conventions of artistic representation. Sometimes, there are errors or perceived errors in the artistic or linguistic originals.

Tactical translations are even more difficult. Because tactical systems are never presented in a straightforward way within the text, they must be interpolated from a broad knowledge of the whole manuscript in question, and ideally, with a number of related manuscripts as well. They must also be made by someone with sufficient physical skill and experience using the weapons. And these translations are even more prone to biases by the interpreter, so creating frameworks for analyzing and understanding them in both a historical and in modern contexts are necessary.

Despite these difficulties, over the Internet, at national and international symposia, and in print, a vibrant community of interpreters has begun aspects of these reconstructions. But despite the progress of efforts made since 1998, the work has been hampered by a lack of an accepted methodology. Differences in background, objectives, and skill-sets have resulted in a patchwork approach that is exceedingly difficult to validate, and this validation is critical in order to secure acceptance into the larger communities of academic and martial arts practitioners.

Interpretation of the Medieval Martial Arts

Each interpreter must, of necessity, work with the historical arts on four levels, the linguistic, technical or physical, the pedagogical, and the tactical. Each of these types of translation is, of necessity, interpretative; an individual expression of the historical record.

At the linguistic level, he must have access to and be able to translate or read a version of the original text. Ideally, the interpreter could read the original text and would conduct any
translators on the basis of a practical understanding of the system as a whole garnered over many years’ study. These translations should be considered “works in progress,” as they will change under the pressure of the interpreter’s deepening understanding and the review process involved in publication and critique. Over time, increasingly accepted versions of the text in multiple languages will provide the solid base necessary to support technical interpretations of the illustrations and text and the translation of these interpretations into physical technique.

At the technical level, the physical techniques must be puzzled out from surviving illustrations and text. This difficult should be supported by the use of historically accurate reproductions of the weapons, defensive armour, and clothing of the time. Moreover, technical interpretations can benefit from an understanding of how similar movements are made in other martial arts, especially with respect to kinesthetic manipulations as in joint locks, bars, and throws.24 But physical interpretations cannot really be satisfactory until they have been validated and tested, and they cannot be tested until they are mastered sufficiently to be executed at speed under the stress of an

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24 There is an important caution that must be added here. Every martial art makes assumptions about balance, movement, and tactical philosophy which distinguish it from other arts. Interpreters experienced in other arts often bring their habits into the exploration of the medieval arts, which although useful, can also produce anachronistic technical expressions alien to the original art. Certainly, all interpreters will infuse the medieval arts with modern material, but those interested in reestablishing the arts as closely as possible to their original source material must be on guard for these difficulties.
encounter, which requires training and experience.

We do not know much about how medieval combatants trained; indeed this is one of the fascinating potentials for the historical understanding of these treatises. This is also the reason that modern interpreters could profit immeasurably with recourse to modern methods and research into motor learning principles as explanations, drills, exercises, games, conditioning and psychological preparation techniques are developed. Using these techniques, historical interpreters can ensure that their execution of historical techniques will be made with sufficient martial efficiency and mental encoding that they will hold up under the stress of competitive testing. And this testing is necessary for validation of the techniques as a whole.

The tactical level is the most difficult. While the linguistic and technical translations may be firmly rooted and are documented from the surviving record with relative ease, we do not yet adequately understand their tactical expression. We may find that some treatises encode their tactical assumptions in the order in which techniques are presented, while in other cases the tactical system may be harder to puzzle out. Today, few practitioners have an encapsulating system, likely because they are still working at the linguistic and technical levels. Modern systems of tactical evaluation, such as Boyd’s OODA loop, may be profitably employed to lend insight and suggested directions for theoretical exploration.25

Towards a Testing Methodology

I believe that in order to gain validation within the martial arts communities, groups now

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25 Lt. Col. John Boyd, USAF, in analyzing conflict theory, created the OODA loop (observe, orient, decide, act). Although Boyd himself conveyed his work primarily through slide-based briefings, his theory has been usefully examined by Frans Osinga, *Science, Strategy and War: The Strategic Theory of John Boyd*. Strategy and history. London: Routledge, 2006. While intended for larger-scale military conflict, the theory applies equally well as a tactical model for martial arts. In the Italian system, for example, “turning inside” the opponent’s weapon and his decision-cycle accurately describes Fiore’s approach.
engaged in interpretation must be open to a continual process of testing of their interpretations on three levels. First, their literary translations must be tested in the traditional academic methods through publication, peer review, and debate. Second, their physical translations must be tested for both martial efficiency and faithfulness to the original source material through a combination of physical presentations made in person or in recorded format and traditional print vehicles. Third, I believe that emerging tactical systems may also be tested in competitions both on an informal and at formal levels. These testing regimes will create a “marketplace of ideas” that can winnow out less efficient or less historically accurate interpretations. While the first layer of interpretations will take place in a more traditionally academic environment, the second two would benefit greatly through traffic with the larger community of martial artists.

I will not say a great deal about literary translations beyond what I have written above, because this form of validation and the arduous production of facsimiles, editions and
translations is already underway and will proceed through the usual process of peer review. This
literary translation does include, however, the establishment of historical context and historical
importance of the works in question and must strive to answer questions regarding the
manuscripts representational or exceptional nature. As more academically-qualified martial
artists are drawn to the manuscripts, the process will improve in terms of both speed and quality.

With regard to technical or physical translations, I believe there are two criteria which
must be considered with respect to validation. First, if the treatises represent coherent systems, as
I believe they do, then the interpretations should be internally consistent and should adhere to
principles which will gradually emerge as interpreters gain deeper knowledge of each system.
Second, each should be evaluated with respect to a concept I term “martial efficiency.” The
technical interpretation must make sense in the historical framework for which the art was
intended. This process must include not only work within one manuscript or master-at-arms, but
in comparison with others. These comparisons can move in two directions; vertically, in the
same tradition but changing over time (as in the German system, or within the later Italian one);
or horizontally, against manuscripts dating from nearly the same date and using the same
physical equipment. The testing should not only be restricted to other “Western” martial arts
schools, but should also be extended to those practicing better known Asian arts, especially as
crucial interpersonal and inter-group connections are finally established.

Additionally, technical interpretations can be profit with respect to martial efficiency
through recourse to modern kinesthetic analysis techniques, such as time-motion studies and
force-measurement tools employed in other sports optimization programs.

Finally, the result may be tested in competitions. Informal competitions, sparring, should
be highly valued by practitioners in order to validate their tactical assumptions. Intra-school
competitions are a valuable way of creating both camaraderie and measuring progress, while inter-school competitions, sparring matches and tournaments, both within the Western martial arts community and beyond, will be crucial to the validation process.

All of these testing regimes leave out questions of group organization, structure, leadership, and title recognition and I leave these questions for another article. For now it is enough, I believe, to present my vision for the internal and external processes practitioners can use in order to attain validation.
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