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*A Falchion / Langes Messer Fencing Treatise by Johannes
Lecküchner (1482)*



Coat of arms of Dukes in Bavaria of the House of Wittelsbach.

Lecküchner Johannes, 1478 [*Fechtbuch*]. Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg, Cod. Pal. Germ. 430, 1v

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PART I

Lecküchner's Langes Messer Fencing – Its Origin and Sources

Johannes Lecküchner of Nürnberg is the author of two extensive manuscripts on Langes Messer fencing. Lecküchner matriculated at Leipzig in 1455 and on September 17, 1457 he was mentioned as *baccalarius artium*. On September 22, 1459 he received his lower ordainment in Bamberg and on 30 June 1478 he matriculated at Heidelberg as a parish priest. From March 15, 1480 he was a parish priest in Herzogenaurach. He died on December 31, 1482 ((Lecküchner 1478 [henceforth as: Cod. Pal. Germ. 430] 2r, 114v-115r; Lecküchner 1482 [henceforth as: Cgm 582 1r, 216v; Hils 1985a, 642; Hils 1985b, 68-70; Lorbeer, Lorbeer 2007; Lecküchner 1482 Lorbeer, Lorbeer, Heim, Brunner, Kiermayer, 5).

Two facts seem to have special significance concerning Lecküchner's biography. First, he studied at Heidelberg, where students were interested in attending classes in martial arts, which can be derived from the bans on attending such classes, issued by the university authorities in 1386, 1415 and 1421 (Anglo 2000, 7-8; Schubert 1995, 239-240). Therefore, it cannot be excluded that this environment had some influence on Lecküchner's martial education as well. The other speciality is that Lecküchner was a priest. In the oldest known European swordsmanship manual (known as MS I.33), dated to the beginning of the 14th century, a priest teaches his student to fight with the sword and buckler. Furthermore, Hanko Döbringer, mentioned in the manuscript containing the oldest record of Liechtenauer's teaching, was also a clergyman (Nürnberg Hausbuch, Cod. Hs. 3227a, 1389; Döbringer is often considered as the author of this treatise, but in the light of recent research it does not seem well-founded). In medieval literature we can find from time to time martial artist with a priest / monk professional background. However, such data, although it speaks for itself, is too scarce (apart from the separate question of military orders) to talk about a more profound martial arts tradition among the clergy (Anglo 2000, 22-23; Wierschin 1965, 69; MS. I. 33 Forgeng; Wagner, Hand, 2003; Żabiński 2008; Forgeng, Kiermayer 2007, 153-154; Döbringer 1389).

Many words have already been written on the nature and function of European *Fechtbücher*. Although it was obvious in the Middle Ages times that martial arts and skills could not be learnt from books alone, it was considered wise and recommended to prepare written records of the art of combat (Clements 2008a, 7-9, 11, 13). Quite naturally, European *Fechtbücher* do not constitute a uniform set (Müller 1992, 251). The following purposes can be assumed for such written records: support during learning and teaching, as work of reference, a gift to a wealthy patron, aimed to obtaining employment or pension, a record of teaching, or a self-presentation (see, e.g., Clements 2008a, 4-5, 9-17; Bodemer 2008, 64-67; Anglo 2008, 146-147; Müller 1992, 252; Welle 1993, 3, 37; Hull 2008; Forgeng, Kiermayer 2007, 161-165).

There are two manuscripts of Lecküchner with his Lange Messer teachings. The first one is preserved in the Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg. It is a paper codex, having IV + 120 charts, containing the text only, save 1v with a depiction of a knight in a Gothic plate armour who holds a coat of arms with Palatinate lions and Bavarian lozenges. It is obviously related to Duke Philip (Elector Palatine of the Rhine), to whom the work was dedicated (see 115v). The manuscript is

an autograph of Lecküchner, which can be said based on notes on 2r and 114v. It is written in a Middle Franconian/Bavarian dialect, with a bastard script (Cod. Pal.

Germ. 430, see also Hils 1985b, 68-70, 9092 and Hils 1985a, 642 – according to him, Duke Philip the Upright (*der Aufrichtige*) of the Palatinate (1476-1508, since 1474 married to Princess Margaret of Bavaria-Landshut), of the Wittelsbach dynasty, was meant to be the intended recipient of the manuscript).

The other manuscript is preserved in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in München. On 216v it bears a note based on which it is possible to date both works of Lecküchner. The note says that the München manuscript was completed in 1482; moreover, it is stated that the “matter” (i.e., Lecküchner’s codification of the Messer fighting system) was accomplished in 1478. Thus, the other date may be referred to the Heidelberg manuscript. The München manuscript is also an autograph of Lecküchner (see notes on 1r and 216v). It has 217 charts, containing beside the text description related colour images. It is also written in a Middle Franconian/Bavarian dialect, with a bastard script, and it also bears a dedication to Duke Philip as the Heidelberg manuscript. It is assumed that Lecküchner did not manage to present his work personally to Duke Philip and the manuscript was donated instead to Palatine Philip Ludwig (1547-1614) on 24 August 1579 by a superintendent Johann Tettelbach (Cgm 582, Hils 1985b, 69, 90-92; Hils 1985a, 642; Lorbeer, Lorbeer 2007; Lecküchner 1482 Lorbeer, Lorbeer, Heim, Brunner, Kiermayer, 5).

Some remarks can be made concerning the way this manuscript was written. There are several pages provided with images only (49r, 49v, 107v, 180r, 180v, 181r, 181v). Furthermore, on 97r the text says that the image on the page is “meaningless:” “Item das untten gemalt stett Ist nichtz wedeuten etc.”-“Then, what is depicted below, does not mean anything.” Moreover, there are two letters “B” and “A” at the beginning of the text on 157v and 158r respectively. In all probability they indicate that the order of the comments and pictures should be reversed. Therefore, it can be assumed that the manuscript was first illustrated and then the text was added. Several pages show the text positioned around the image, where the author took care not to write over the coloured image (25r, 27v, 28v, 66r, 71r, 71v, 99v, 128v, 184v, 193v). For 157v and 158r, as there was no way to change the sequence of the images, the author simply provided the images with comments, but indicated a proper sequence of the techniques. This was a common practice at that time for producing martial art treatises, and it often causes understanding and interpretation problems today (MS. I. 33 Forgeng, 3-4, 7-8; for a reverse order, i.e., text first and then images,

see, e.g., Czynnier 1538 Bergner, Giessauf, 13). Quite naturally, some words should also be spent on the relation between the images and the text. As almost every section of the text is provided with a relevant image, both play an equally significant role in understanding and interpreting a given technique (on the issue of the text-image relation see, e. g., Hils 1985b, 144-145; Bodemer 2008, 69-80; Meyer 1570 Forgeng 14-15). On the other hand, the images provide a snapshot of one phase of a technique, which sometimes renders the interpretation fairly difficult (cf. Welle 1993, 74-83).

According to Hils, the manuscript of 1482 is based on its prequel of 1478 and was enriched with explanatory images. In general, Lecküchner's work is based on the longsword system of Johannes Liechtenauer – however, it is by no means a plagiarism (as we would understand it today), but to a great degree a genuine teaching (Hils 1985a, 68, 90-91, 183-185; Forgeng, Kiermayer 2007, 157).

Thus, it is worth examining both the relation of the two manuscripts of Lecküchner to each other (Lorbeer, Lorbeer, Heim, Brunner and Kiermayer consider the 1478 manuscript as a sort of archetype or concept for the 1482 one, Lecküchner 1482 Lorbeer, Lorbeer, Heim, Brenner, Kiermayer, 5) as well as possible connections of Lecküchner's teaching to manuscripts containing the longsword teaching of Liechtenauer. In the process of research, it turned out that there could be a particularly relevant relation between the teaching of Lecküchner and the manuscript of Lew Jud (Lew Jud, after 1452 [henceforth as: Lew]; according to Hils, Lew's manuscript derives from the *Fechtbuch* of Peter von Danzig 1452 [henceforth as: von Danzig], see Hils 1985b, 153-157, see also his *stemmam codicum*, 149 as well as its emendations by Welle 1993, 50-73). Thus, the first step is to compare both manuscripts of Lecküchner and the longsword unarmoured combat (*Bloßfechten*) according to Liechtenauer as recorded in the manuscript of Lew.¹ An abbreviated comparison is presented in a form of a table (see Appendix 1). The basic unit is a “paragraph,” i.e., a fragment of verses with comments.

In most cases the manuscript from 1482 repeats its prequel from 1478 either in a literary manner or with only minor changes. In some cases it seems that Lecküchner modified his ideas and techniques more profoundly in the 1482 version. Furthermore, Lecküchner decided not to include all techniques from his 1478 manuscript into the later work. Conversely, there are numerous

¹ Apart from this section (Lew, 1r-53v), the work of Lew also contains teaching of armoured foot combat of Martin Hundsfeld (54r-70r), Andreas Liegnitzer (70r-83v, with an erroneous heading pointing to Hundsfeld),

techniques in the manuscript from 1482 which are not covered in any form in the earlier version. These may reflect developments in Lecküchner's ideas of swordsmanship, presumably also accounting for other contemporary sources.

In reference to the relation between Lecküchner and Lew, it was possible in many cases to identify likely relationships between Lew and the 1478 manuscript or even an origin of a relevant fragment of the latter from Lew's manuscript. Furthermore, in other places (26r, 28v, 34r-35r, 37v-38r, 41r-41v, 54r-55v, 103v-104v) Lecküchner's manuscript from 1478 repeats Lew's text literally. This strongly suggests that the manuscript of Lew was a direct source of Lecküchner's work from 1478. This assumption can be backed up with the fact that Lecküchner's manuscript from 1482 (62v) contains a fragment missing in the version from 1478 but present in the work of Lew. This would mean that Lecküchner used Lew to base both manuscripts on and most likely is guideline for the whole Lecküchner teachings on the Langes Messer. Apart from the influence of Lew's longsword teaching, several analogies between Lecküchner and teaching on armoured sword combat (*Kampffechten*) according to Master Andreas Liegnitzer, which are outlined as well in Lew's work, can be found. Obviously, they rather concern an application of similar general principles than precisely the same techniques (see Appendix 1).

Furthermore, there are some analogies between Lecküchner's techniques and those described for the dagger and the longsword by other contemporary masters-at-arms. Remarkable in Lecküchner's teaching is a great variety of throwing and armlock techniques.

These are also covered in lengthy detail in the manuscripts of Hans Talhoffer (Talhoffer 1459a [henceforth as: Talhoffer 1459]; Talhoffer 1459b [henceforth as: Talhoffer, Alte Armatur]; Talhoffer 1467). For the same reason, a 15th century fighting manuscript known as *Codex Wallerstein* should be drawn into consideration. As the textual parts of Talhoffer's works are extremely brief, it seems hardly possible to relate Talhoffer's manuscripts to Lecküchner's work in a meaningful way. A direct influence of the *Codex Wallerstein* dagger

sword and buckler combat of Liegnitzer (84r-84v), hand-to-hand combat of Ott the Jew (85r-94v), and mounted combat of Liechtenauer with Lew's comments (95r-124r), see also Hils 1985b, 32-34.

section on the manuscript of Lecküchner could not be proven, either. Even though, numerous similarities between dagger and longsword techniques from both the works of Talhoffer and the *Codex Wallerstein*, on the one hand, and Lecküchner's Messer techniques, on the other, strongly

suggest that Lecküchner made an extensive use of contemporary well known longsword and dagger techniques (particularly hand-to-hand combat) to compile his own repertoire.

Apart from tracking Lecküchner's sources in manuscripts dealing with the art of the two-handed longsword according to Liechtenauer, a question emerges whether Liechtenauer's fighting principles were applied to one-handed weapons (particularly Langes Messers) before Lecküchner. These fighting principles as applied by Lecküchner are discussed in detail in the section devoted to practical analysis of his teaching. However, it is worth stating some basic remarks about the fundamental rules of Liechtenauer's longsword system here (for an overview of Liechtenauer's principles, see, e.g., Galas 1998; Galas 1997; Tobler 2004; Tobler 2001; Clements 2008b; Wierschin 1965):

- *vor*-“before” or the “first stroke” and *nach*-“after” or the “stroke after.” As soon as the opponent is within the range of attack, the swordsman should always try and attack first. This forces the opponent to focus on defending himself and prevents him from gaining the initiative in combat. If the swordsman's first attack was defended against by the opponent, the swordsman is to immediately deliver another attack, in order to prevent the opponent from regaining the initiative. On the other hand, if the opponent managed to strike first and the swordsman has to defend himself, he should
 - immediately deliver a counterattack in order to regain the initiative also called riposte;
- in case it is necessary for the swordsman to defend himself against the opponent's attack, it should not be done with passive blocks, but with counters, i.e., strikes, cuts or thrusts). Ideally, a counter will stop the opponents's attack and hit him at the same time;
- *indes, fulen, schwach* and *sterck* or “simultaneously,” or “as soon as,” “feeling,” “strong” and “weak.” As soon as blades of both combatants meet, the swordsman is to feel whether the resistance of the adversary's weapon is strong or weak and act accordingly. Generally, one is to overcome the opponents's “strength” with one's own “weakness” and *vice versa*;
- in case it comes to a blade-to-blade contact, it is generally (but not always!) recommended not to withdraw one's weapon, but to “bind” on the opponent's weapon (*binden*) and fight *am schwert* or “at the sword.” This means delivering one's own attacks without breaking the contact with the opponent's weapon according to the principles of “strong” and “weak.” This enables the swordsman to control the opponent's actions.

The scarcity of textual comments to the works of Talhoffer prevents the researcher from drawing decisive conclusions about the nature of Langes Messer fencing as featured by this master. Based on sections on Langes Messer and one-hand sword with buckler from his 1476 manuscript and his *Alte Armatur* from 1459, it seems that in numerous cases (Talhoffer 1467, Plates 223, 224, 230, 231, 232, 233, 235 and 236; Talhoffer, *Alte Armatur*, 120v and 121v) an opponent's attack is not met with a counterstroke but with a block-like displacement. On the other hand, in several instances a defense by means of a counterstroke may be presumed (Talhoffer 1467, Plates 226, 227, 228, 229, 234, 235, 238, 239, 240 and 241; Talhoffer, *Alte Armatur*, 119r, 119v, 121r, 122r, 123r and 123v). The techniques from the other groups usually have their analogies in Lecküchner's manuscript from 1482.

More can be inferred concerning *die stuck mitt dem buckler* (sword and buckler techniques) featured in numerous Liechtenauer-related manuscripts (e.g., see the relevant sections in Tobler 2004, Tobler 2001 and Wierschin 1965). They were referred to as the teaching of Master Andreas Liegnitzer in the work of Peter von Danzig (see von Danzig, 80r). Obviously, these techniques must be interpreted with great care in regard to their compatibility with Liechtenauer's principles, because due to the availability of the buckler it is possible for the swordsman to separate the actions of defense and attack.

In the first technique the swordsman fights "on the sword" in case his first stroke is countered, which is in perfect accordance with Liechtenauer's teaching. On the other hand, in the next technique the swordsman counters the opponent's attack from above with his own stroke from below. Furthermore, if the opponent defends against the subsequent thrust, the swordsman attacks the lower openings. The swordsman can safely do so without losing control of the opponent's weapon due to the possible use of the buckler. In the third technique the swordsman defends against the opponent's attack from above with his own stroke from below. Then, he strikes "on the sword" to the other side, which is according to Liechtenauer's teaching. In case the opponent defends against it, the swordsman attacks the lower openings. Again, it may be assumed that he controls the adversary's weapon with the buckler. Fighting "on the sword" may also be assumed for the fourth technique, where the swordsman attacks the opponent with "cross strokes" on both sides and then with a stroke to his head, which is followed with a thrust downwards. Liechtenauer's principles may also be assumed for the fifth technique where the swordsman feints

a thrust from above and thrusts at the opponent's torso from below. In case the opponent defends against the thrust, the swordsman attacks his right leg, in all probability controlling the opponent's weapon with the buckler. In the last technique the opponent strikes or thrusts from above. The swordsman defends against it with the half-sword and then fights hand-to-hand. Again, although such a way of defense does not seem to fit well into Liechtenauer's principles, it may be considered legitimate due to the presence of the buckler.

Because of the use of the buckler it is hard to find any direct analogies between these techniques and those featured by Lecküchner. However, a similarity between the first technique (von Danzig, 80r) and that depicted by Lecküchner (Cgm 582, 7r) is notable. In both cases the swordsman strikes from above and then thrusts. This is followed with a stroke "on the sword" to the other side.

An interpretation of main fighting principles in the sword-and-buckler manuscript MS.I.33² demonstrates that in many cases they are very similar to general rules of swordsmanship as stated by Liechtenauer. The rules of proper timing (*vor* and *nach*), recommending the swordsman to attack first, to continue the attack after the first strike or to immediately counter in order to regain the initiative, are present throughout the manuscript (e.g., 4r, 4v, 5v, 6r, 6v, 9r, 10v, 11r, 11v, 13r, 20v, 21v, 26r, 26v, 28r, 28v, 30r, 31r, 31v, 32r). The same can be said about Liechtenauer's principle of defending against the opponent's attacks with one's own counters (*versetzen*), very often combined with *binden* and fighting *am schwert* (e.g., 2r, 2v, 3r, 3v, 6r, 6v, 7v, 8v, 9r, 10v, 11r, 12r, 13v, 14r, 14v, 15r, 15v, 16r, 17r, 17v, 23r, 25r, 25v, 27v, 28r, 28v, 29r, 29v). Usually the *binden* is done with the buckler: the swordsman pushes the opponent's weapon away with the buckler and attacks him with the sword at the same time (e.g., 2v, 5r, 7r, 9v, 10r, 14r, 16r, 18r, 28r, 29r, 30v, 32v). A general principle of a simultaneous attack and control of the opponent's weapon seems to be analogous to Liechtenauer's teaching.

The assumption that fighting principles as codified by Liechtenauer were also applied for one-handed weapons can be also be supported by the Nürnberger Hausbuch (Cod. Hs. 3227a, 1389). In the short comments on fighting with the *langes messer* (82r-82v), it says that swordfighting rules were taken from and founded upon the Langes Messer fighting (see also Hils 1985b, 183).

² See MS.I.33 Forging, and Wagner, Hand, 2003. However, the authors' own translation and interpretation of this treatise was used in the present work.

It is worth completing the analysis of the origin of Lecküchner's teaching with some remarks on the later spread of his work. Hils says that Lecküchner's teaching was selectively copied by Hans von Speyer in 1491. It was also applied in a selective or changed way by Peter Falkner (the end of the 15th century) and Albrecht Dürer (1512). The teaching of Lecküchner is presented as a venerable tradition only in the works by Paulus Hector Mair (after 1542-1553), which include an extensive copy of Lecküchner's text, but with the word "Messer" being replaced by "Dussack". In addition Mair offers his own chapter on the Dussack, this one equipped with 40 elaborate pictures. Hils says that Mair's text and images are rather independent from the work by Lecküchner. Among other manuscripts which contain teachings on *Messerfechten*, one could also highlight manuscripts by Paulus Kal (c. 1459-1497 and later copies), Gregor Erhard of Augsburg (1533), the compendia of Christian Egenolph (1531, 1535) and Jörg Wilhalm (1556) (Hils 1985b, 31, 31, 46, 61, 87-88, 99-100, 123, 183-187 and Hils 1985b, 642-644).

Falchions and Lange Messer – Their Origin and Development

This work does not intend to provide a detailed study of weaponry. Therefore, we will only discuss here some weapon traditions in medieval Europe which may have contributed to the development of late medieval single-edged weapons as depicted by Lecküchner.

Seitz says that there were two main types (Type I and Type II) of single-edged weapons in Europe in the High Middle Ages. In Type I (for which the authors of this work decided to use the source term *Langes Messer*) the blade may be straight or curved, but a distinctive feature is the presence of the "short edge" on the back of the blade. For Type II (which is referred to as falchion by the authors) blades are straight and they broaden towards the point. Their backs are always straight and blunt, so are "truly" single-edged. Seitz assumes that Type I may be of Oriental origin and it may have appeared in Europe in the Crusades period. On the other hand, Type II (considered by Seitz to be chiefly limited to Britain and north-western Europe) is assumed by this author to have possibly originated from Continental and Scandinavian *sax*, with additional influence of Type I (Seitz 1965, 187-192, Figs. 117119, 121). The evolution of falchions from Norse *saxes* is also assumed by Oakeshott (Oakeshott 2000, 152).

Therefore, the first possible tradition is that of Viking Age single-edged swords. Petersen points to Norwegian finds of late Migration Period (up to c. 750) single-edged swords with no guards, which he assumes to have originated from Frankish *scramasax*. In Norway by the beginning of the Viking Age (c. 750) they started to be provided with typical hilts of double-edged swords. Their blades developed from weapons that range from knifesized to those c. 90 cm in length. They are in most cases straight, with edges that are almost parallel. Points taper, but there are no “short edges,” i.e., the entire back edge of the blade is straight and blunt. It is notable that single-edged blades were usually broader, thicker and heavier (sometimes well over 1.5 kg) than their double-edged counterparts. Quite often they wield rather heavily, due to their point of balance being well towards the point. Singleedged swords of that kind are rare after c. 1000 (Petersen 1919, 8-9, 55-59, 61-62, 68, 76, 82, 85, 91, 94, 102, 117-118, 137, 160-162, 166, 170; Peirce 2004, 20-21, 39-41, 48-51).

For example, we can mention a Type C sword (c. 800-after 900) from Dublin, Ireland (National Museum of Ireland, Dublin, WK-31). Its total length is 82 cm, with a blade length of 66.5 cm. The blade is very broad (7 cm at the guard), heavy and unhandy to wield. Another sword (Type C, c. 800-after 900) comes from North Arhus in Norway (Universitetets Oldsaksamling, Oslo, C 24217). Its total length is 92 cm, with a blade length of 76 cm. The pattern welded blade is provided with a fuller, which improves its wieldability. However, the entire weapon is still very heavy (Peirce 2004, 39-41).

Single-edged weapons with curved blades were known in Western Europe around 1250. Such weapons usually have sword-type hilts, while their blades may be either of curved sabre type (e.g., a c. 1250-1275 French manuscript image of Moslem troops during the siege of Tyre) (Nicolle 1988, Vol. 1, No. 779a, 313, Vol. 2, No.779a, 802; Nicolle 1999, No. 61c, 39-40, 376) or may be straight and broadening towards the point (e.g., a c. 1300 French manuscript) (Nicolle 1988, Vol. 1, No. 780, 313-314, Vol. 2, No. 780, 802; Nicolle 1999, No. 62, 40, 376). Sometimes the blade may have even more developed forms, as can be seen, e.g., in a c. 1300-1325 manuscript from Normandy, where the blade broadens towards the point and is provided with a “hook” on the back edge (Nicolle 1988, Vol. 1, No. 797c, 317, Vol. 2, No. 797c, 802; Nicolle 1999, No. 76c, 42, 377) which may be an exaggerated representation of the “short edge.” In some cases the blade seems to be double-edged, as in a c. 1300 English manuscript depiction of martyrdom of St Thomas Becket (Nicolle 1988, Vol. 1, No. 954, 365,

Vol. 2, No. 954, 830; see also Nicolle 1999, No. 197, 77, 395), or in a late 13th century

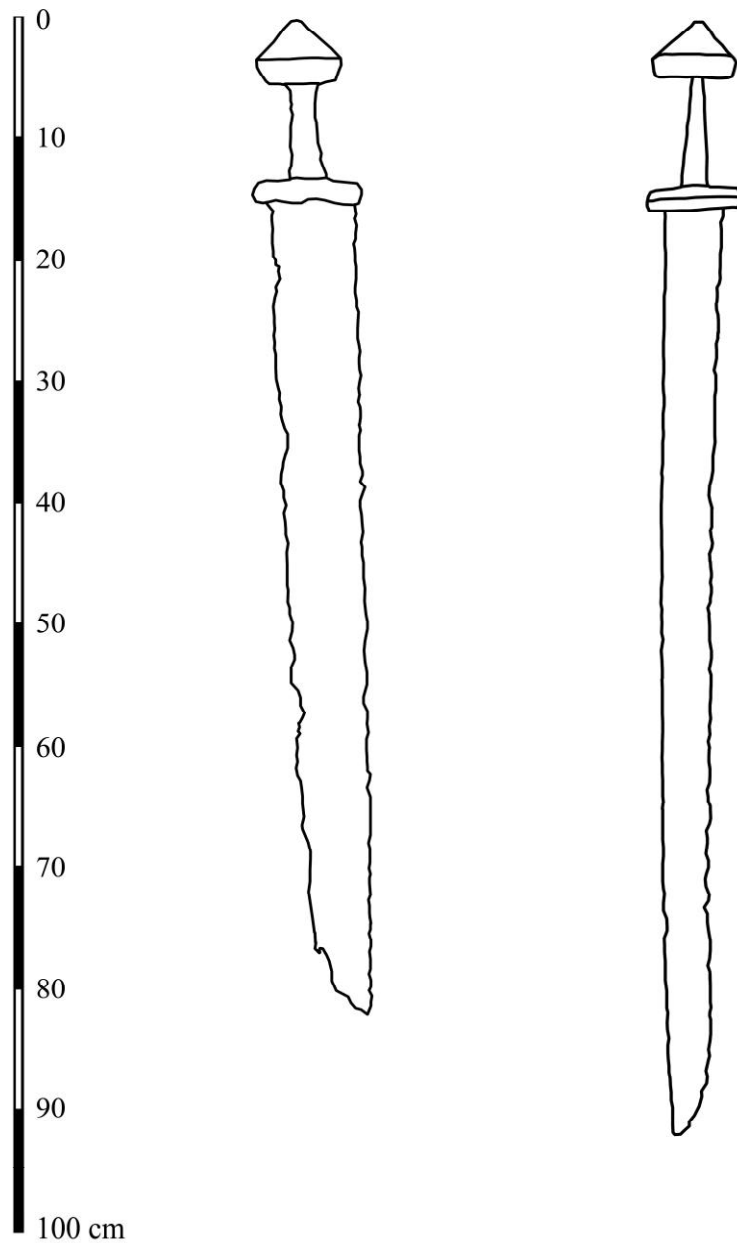


Fig. 1 Single-edged Viking Age swords (both Type C, about 800-after 900).

Left: National Museum of Ireland, WK-31; right: Universitetes Oldsaksamling, Oslo, C 24217).

Drawing after Peirce 2004, 39-41.

Westminster Hall wall painting (Nicolle 1988, No. 959b, 367-368, Vol. 2, No. 959b, 832; see also Nicolle 1999, No. 202b, 80, 397). Of course, an intentional distortion of the manner of depiction

of details in martyrdom scenes cannot be excluded. Seitz considers the weapon from Westminster Hall as an example of merging of his Types I and II (Seitz 1965, 193-194, Fig.123). A c. 1345 German relief of Guards at the Holy Sepulchre presents a falchion with a perhaps straight blade, but due to the presence of the scabbard it cannot be excluded that it broadens towards the point (Nicolle 1988, Vol. 1, No. 1249b-c, 453-453, Vol. 2, No. 1249b-c, 873; see also Nicolle 1999, No. 524b-c, 195-196, 450).

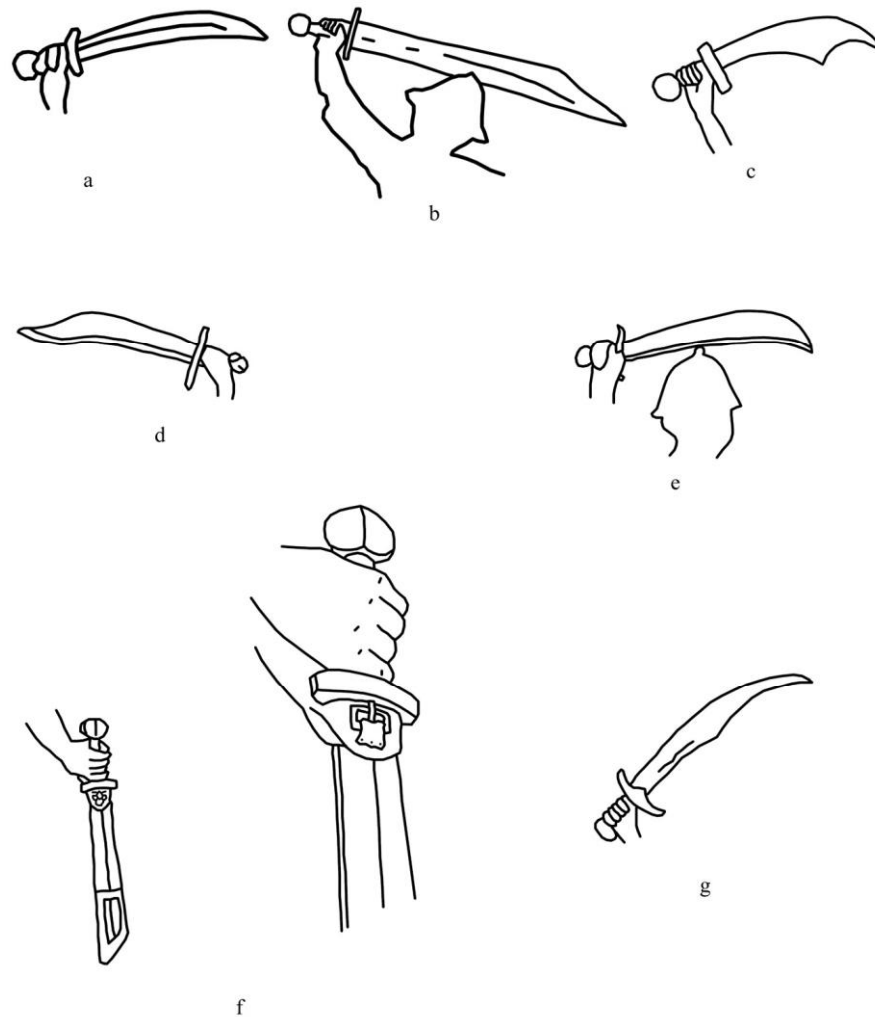


Fig. 2 European Lange Messer and falchions, about 1250-about 1350.

a. France, about 1250-1275. Drawing after Nicolle 1988, Vol. 2, No. 779a, 802.

b. France, about 1300. Drawing after Nicolle 1988, Vol. 2, No. 780, 802.

c. Normandy, about 1300-1325. Drawing after Nicolle 1988, Vol. 2, Illustrations, No. 797c, 803.

d. England, about 1300. Drawing after Nicolle 1988, Vol. 2, No. 954, 830.

- e. England, Westminster Hall, late 13th century. Drawing after Nicolle 1988, Vol. 2, No. 959b, 832.
- f. Germany, Swabia, about 1345. Drawing after Nicolle 1988, Vol. 2, No. 1249b-c, 873.
- g. England, about 1330. Drawing after Nicolle 1999, No. 222, 401.

A well-known example of such weapons is the famous Conyers Falchion, being a late 13th century (perhaps c. 1260-1270) English ceremonial weapon kept at the Cathedral Treasury in Durham. This representative of Type II falchion according to Seitz has a sword type hilt. Its blade with a curved cutting edge broadens towards the point (Nicolle 1988, Vol. 1, No. 915, 356, Vol. 2, No. 915, 823; see also Nicolle 1999, No. 158, 68, 389; Seitz 1965, 188, Fig. 118). The back edge is blunt. The total length of the weapon is 89 cm, with a blade length of 73.4 cm and a total weight of 1.3 kg (Hellqvist 2007).

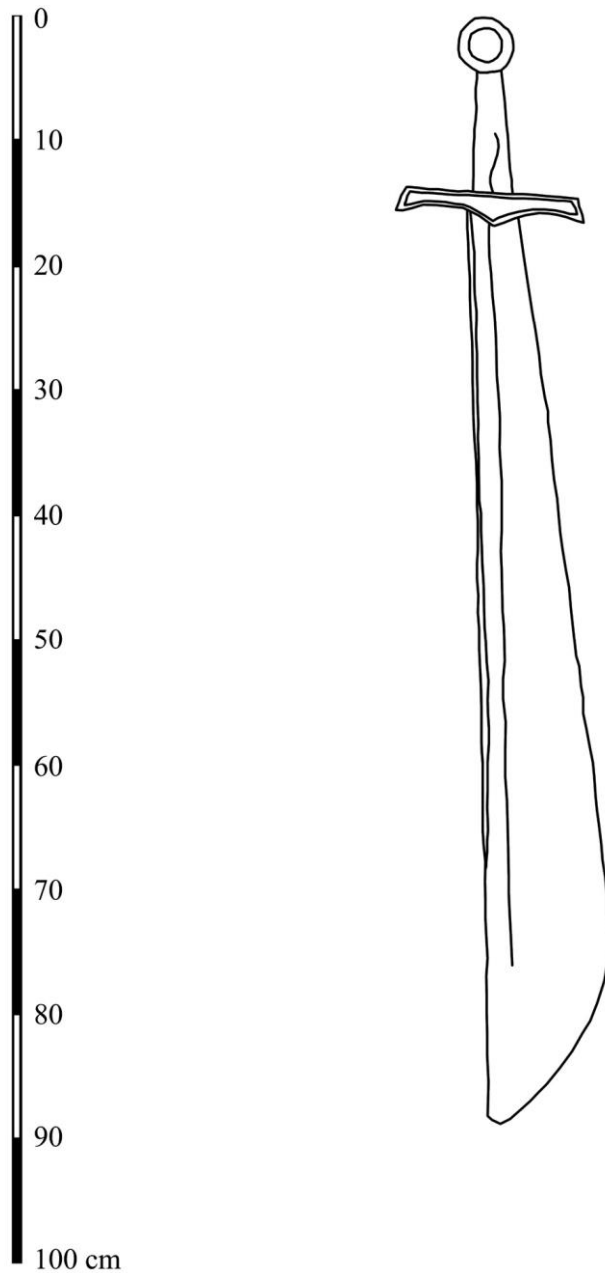


Fig. 3 The Conyers Falchion, England, Durham Cathedral, about 1260-1270.

Drawing after Nicolle 1988, Vol. 2, No. 915, 823.

A majority of blades of these weapons broaden towards the point, which is not the case with weapons depicted in the manuscript of Lecküchner. With regard to that, one's attention is drawn to a Langes Messer from Thorpe (now in Norwich Castle Museum), dated to c. mid-14th century (or, as Oakeshott says, to the late 13th-early 14th century). According to Seitz, this weapon

is a typical representative of Type I. It has a sword type hilt as well, but the blade is straight and is provided with a visible “short edge.”

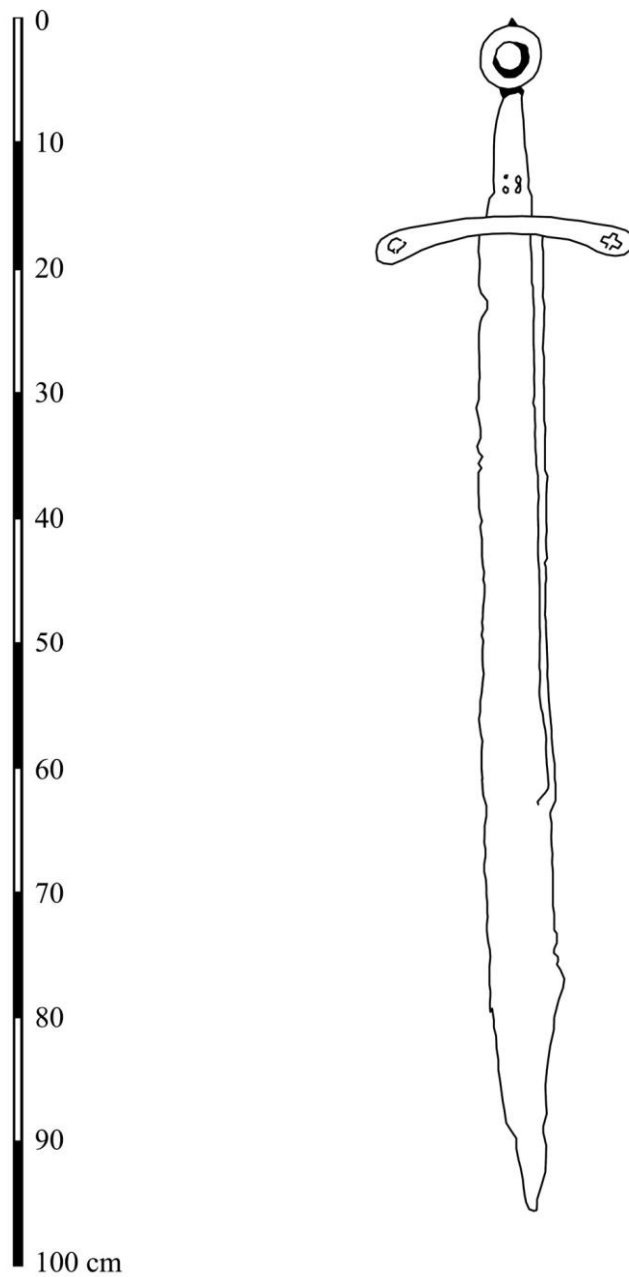


Fig. 4 The Thorpe Messer, England, Norwich Castle Museum, about 1350.

Drawing after Seitz 1965, 187, Fig. 117b.

Oakeshott supposes that although the weapon itself is in all probability English, the blade may have been influenced by Eastern European forms. The total length of the weapon is 95.6 cm, with

a blade of 80.3 cm and a total weight of 0.904 kg (Hellqvist 2007; Flynt 2007; Oakeshott 1964, 235-238, Figs. 116-118; Seitz 1965, 187, Fig. 117b).

Another similar weapon was depicted on a c. 1330 English manuscript (see Fig. 2). It has a sword type hilt and a curved blade, which seems to slightly broaden towards the point. However, a well-marked “short edge” is notable. Nicolle defines this weapon as being midway between a European falchion and an eastern sabre. He says that if existed in reality, it was a development of the normal falchion (Nicolle 1999, No. 222, 85, 401). Therefore, it may perhaps be considered as a transition form to Lecküchner style Langes Messers.

In the 15th century single-edged weapons with blunt back edges seem to have gone out of favour. On the other hand, one notices a great variety of weapons with curved or straight blades with broadened points or not. An interesting example is a straight blade weapon with a one-handed closed hilt, kept in the Tower of London and being of possibly Italian origin (c. 1450) (Seitz 1965, 193-194, Fig. 124; Dufty 1974, No. 15a, 17, Plate 15a).

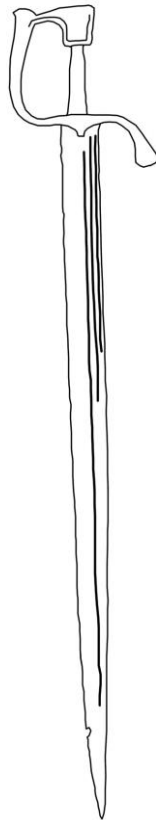


Fig. 5 The Tower of London falchion, possibly Italian, about 1450.

Drawing after Seitz 1965, 194, Fig. 124.

Following general trends in the development of straight double-edged swords, some single-edged weapons commenced to be provided with two-handed hilts. Examples of such so-called *grosse messer* (South German, c. 1490) are preserved in Kunsthistorisches Museum in Wien. Their hilts are usually asymmetrical and they are provided with knife- or sabre-like forms of pommels. Blades vary a great deal: they may be slightly curved, with a short but well-pronounced “short edge,” strongly curved and evenly tapering towards the point, or straight, broadening towards the point, with “short edges” (Seitz 1965, 195-197, Fig. 125; see also Oakeshott 2000, Plate 8D, 154-155; on late medieval and early Renaissance falchions see also Marek 2008, 38-66, 206-252, Figs. 33-79; Marek 2006).

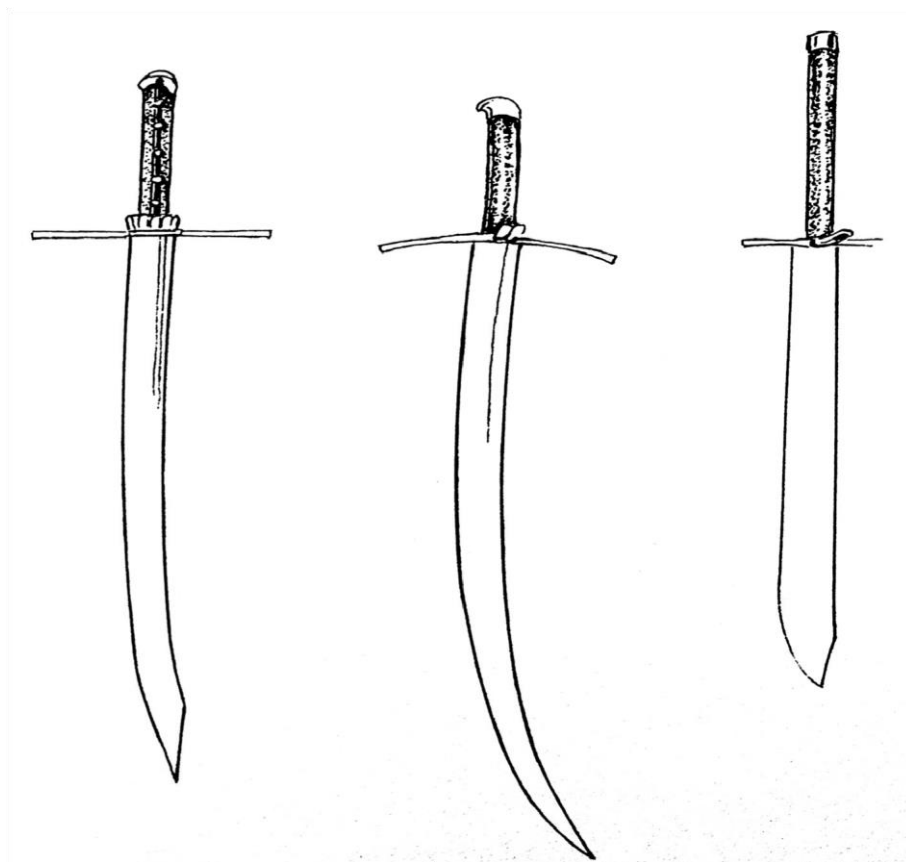


Fig. 6 *Grosse messer*, South Germany, about 1490, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wien.
After Seitz 1965, 195, Fig. 125.

A splendid example of such a weapon is stored in the Collection of the Castle Museum in Malbork in Prussia (inv. No. MZM/502/MT). It can tentatively be dated to the period between the late 15th and the mid-16th c. Its blade has a straight back, along with a single groove. Its short, massive

crosspiece is ornamented with a sort of animal head on the side of the blade's back and it bends strongly towards the pommel on the side of the edge. Five rivets attach bone or antler grip plates to the tang. The hilt enables a comfortable grip with both hands. The point of balance is c. 6 cm from the crosspiece and the weapon wields comfortably. Its metrical data are the following:

- total length: 888 mm
- weight: 1200 g
- blade length: 661 mm
- blade width near the hilt: 46 mm
- blade thickness near the hilt: 5 mm
- blade width near the point: 35.5 mm
- blade thickness near the point: 1.5 mm
- hilt length: 227 mm
- crosspiece span: 125 mm
- crosspiece length: 165 mm
- crosspiece thickness: 13.5 mm
- crosspiece height: 27 mm
- tang length between the crosspiece and the pommel (grip length): 133 mm
- tang width near the crosspiece (grip width): 28 mm
- tang thickness near the crosspiece (grip thickness): 15.5 mm
- tang width near the pommel (grip width): 29 mm
- tang thickness near the pommel (grip thickness): 17 mm
- pommel width (max.): 51.5 mm
- pommel thickness: 16 mm
- pommel height: 75 mm

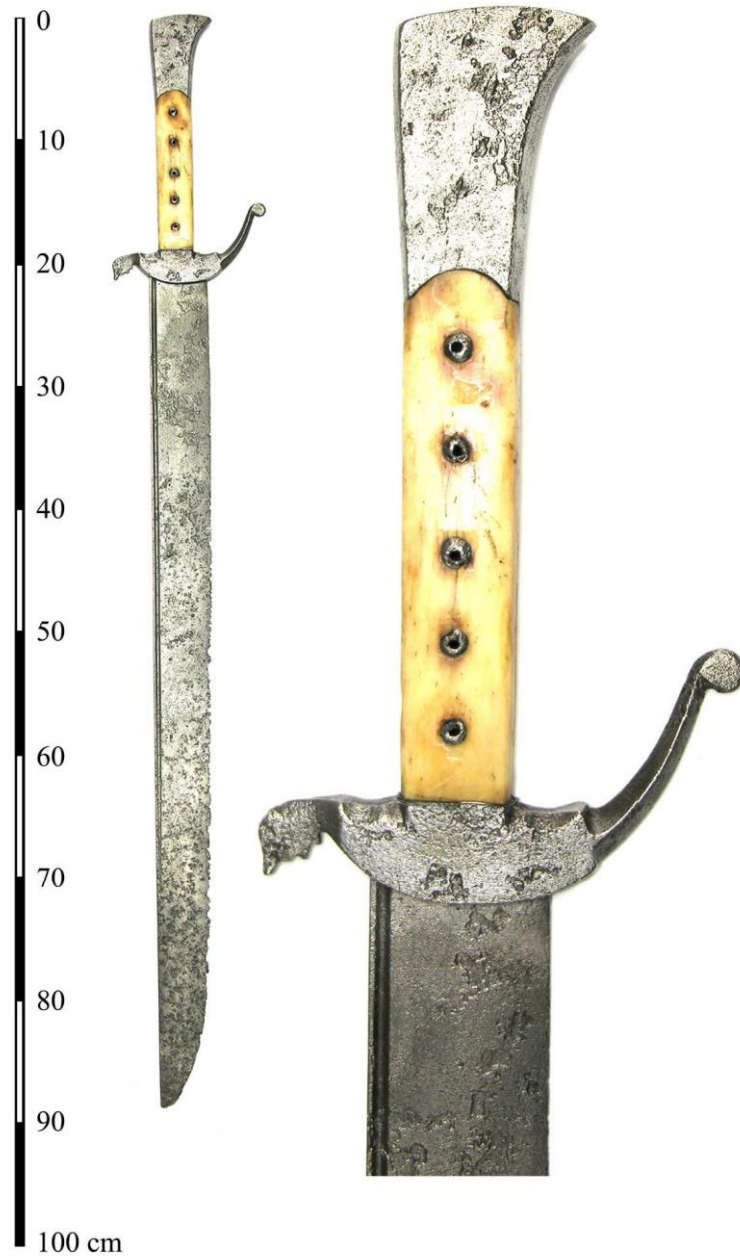


Fig. 7 *Langes messer*, late 15th-mid-16th c. Castle Museum in Malbork, inv. No.

MZM/502/MT. Photo G. Żabiński.

The St. Annen Museum in Lübeck has a large collection of arms, which is not on public display. However unfortunate this may be, it made it possible to inspect many of these weapons at great

length and take detailed measurements. Among them are three Messers, all dating from the mid 15th century or about 1500.

The first Messer has a fairly straight blade with two grooves, remainders of the guard spike and a tapering tang which indicates that it was mounted like a sword. Grip and pommel are missing.

Its metrical data are: - total length: 945 mm

- weight: 765 g (without pommel)

- blade length: 777 mm

- blade width near the hilt: 42 mm

- blade thickness near the hilt: 7 mm

- blade width near the point: 36 mm

- blade thickness near the point: 2.3 mm

- crosspiece length: 160 mm

- crosspiece thickness: 17 mm

- crosspiece height: 17 mm

- tang length between the crosspiece and the pommel (grip length): 150 mm

- tang width near the crosspiece (grip width): 28 mm

- tang thickness near the crosspiece (grip thickness): 5.5 mm

- tang width at the end: 5.5 mm

- tang thickness at the end: 3 mm

- guard spike stump width: 7 mm

- guard spike stump thickness: 5 mm



Fig. 8 Messer, Germany, 15th century, St. Annen Museum, Lübeck. Photo R. Warzecha.

The second Messer, inv. No. 3519, has a curved blade with a pronounced back edge running along 1/3 of the back. Two grooves run along the blade up to the back edge, where they are replaced by a single one up to the tip. The cross guard is S-shaped to cover the hand, a guard spike fixes the cross to the blade. The pommel is welded to the tang. It is curved and features three holes in an equilateral triangle at its end. Handle scales and tip are missing. The blade has the Passau running wolf mark inlaid in brass wire. The metrical data of this Messer are:

- total length: 960 mm (presumably c. 1050 mm with the tip)
- weight: 1102 g
- balance point measured from the cross: 130 mm
- blade length: 745 mm (presumably c. 835 mm with the tip)
- blade width near the hilt: 42 mm
- blade thickness near the hilt: 7.3 mm
- blade width near the point: 35 mm
- blade thickness near the point: 2.6 mm
- crosspiece length: 250 mm
- crosspiece thickness: 14 mm
- crosspiece height: 20 mm
- tang length between the crosspiece and the pommel (grip length): 111 mm
- tang width near the crosspiece (grip width): 29 mm
- tang thickness near the crosspiece: 8 mm
- tang width at the end: 29 mm
- tang thickness at the end: 8 mm
- guard spike length: 32 mm
- guard spike width: 22 mm
- guard spike thickness: 8 mm
- pommel length: 100 mm
- pommel width at the grip: 29 mm
- pommel width at the end: 38 mm
- pommel thickness at the grip: 16 mm
- pommel thickness at the end: 3 mm



Fig. 9 Kriegsmesser, Germany, about 1500, St. Annen Museum, Lübeck, inv. No. 3519, detail in upper right corner: drawing of the brass wire inlay in the blade, identified as the Passau running wolf mark. Photo R. Warzecha.

The third Messer, inv. No. 1934-406, has a straight blade with three grooves and a back edge running along 1/4 of the back. The blade might have been shortened at some point. The cross guard is S-shaped to cover the hand and thickens at the ends to form rhombic caps. A guard spike fixes the cross to the blade, the pommel is short and asymmetrical. The blade has the Passau running wolf mark inlaid in brass wire. The metrical data of this Messer are: - total length: 850 mm

- weight: 1070 g
- balance point measured from the cross: 128 mm
- blade length: 703 mm
- blade width near the hilt: 54 mm
- blade thickness near the hilt: 6.7 mm
- blade width near the point: 46 mm
- blade thickness near the point: 2.1 mm
- crosspiece length: 240 mm
- crosspiece thickness: 12 mm
- crosspiece height: 18 mm
- grip length: 110 mm
- grip width: 35 mm
- grip thickness: 20 mm

- guard spike length: 32 mm
- guard spike width: 26 mm
- guard spike thickness: 6 mm
- pommel length: 28 mm
- pommel width: 35 mm
- pommel thickness: 20 mm

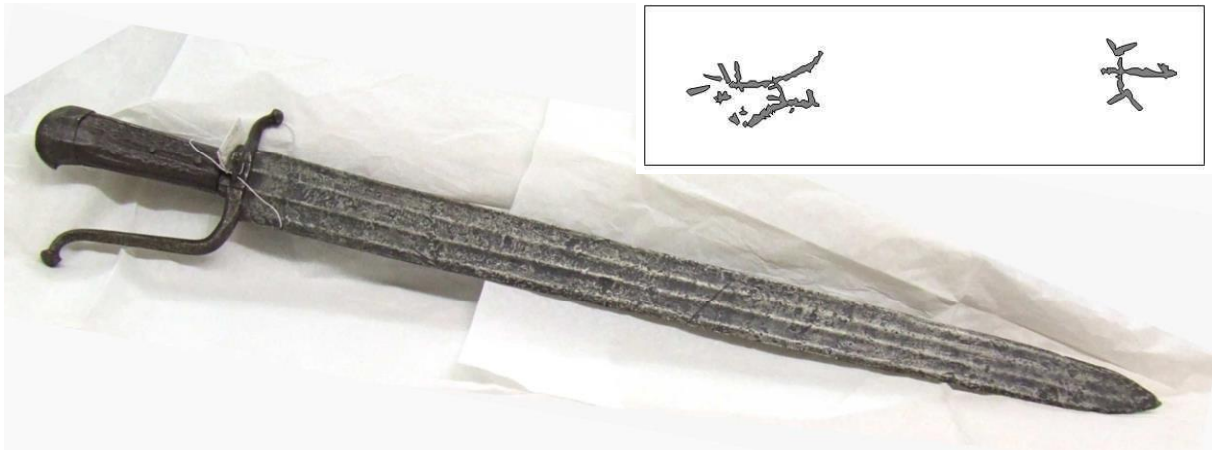


Fig. 10 Messer, Germany, about 1500, St. Annen Museum, Lübeck, inv. No. 1934-406, detail in upper right corner: drawing of the brass wire inlay in the blade, identified as the Passau running wolf mark. Photo R. Warzecha.

An important weaponry tradition which may have had considerable influence on the development of late medieval falchions was that of bladed weapons in Hungary. Its impact may have been especially strong due to close relations between Hungary and German-speaking countries in the Late Middle Ages. Having been originally rooted in the Great Steppe culture and then having been profoundly transformed by Latin Europe's influence, Hungarian weaponry tradition was additionally enriched by the Turkish impact since the mid-14th century. A good example of this impact is a late 15th century sabre. It has a sword hilt of a so-called "Venetian" type, the difference being the fact that the grip is slightly bent towards the "long" edge. The blade is slightly curved, with a well-pronounced "short" edge and a tapering point. The total length is 109 cm, with a blade length of 87 cm. Its total weight is 1.28 kg (Müller, Kölling 1981, 35-36, Fig. 33, 171, No. 33, 365).

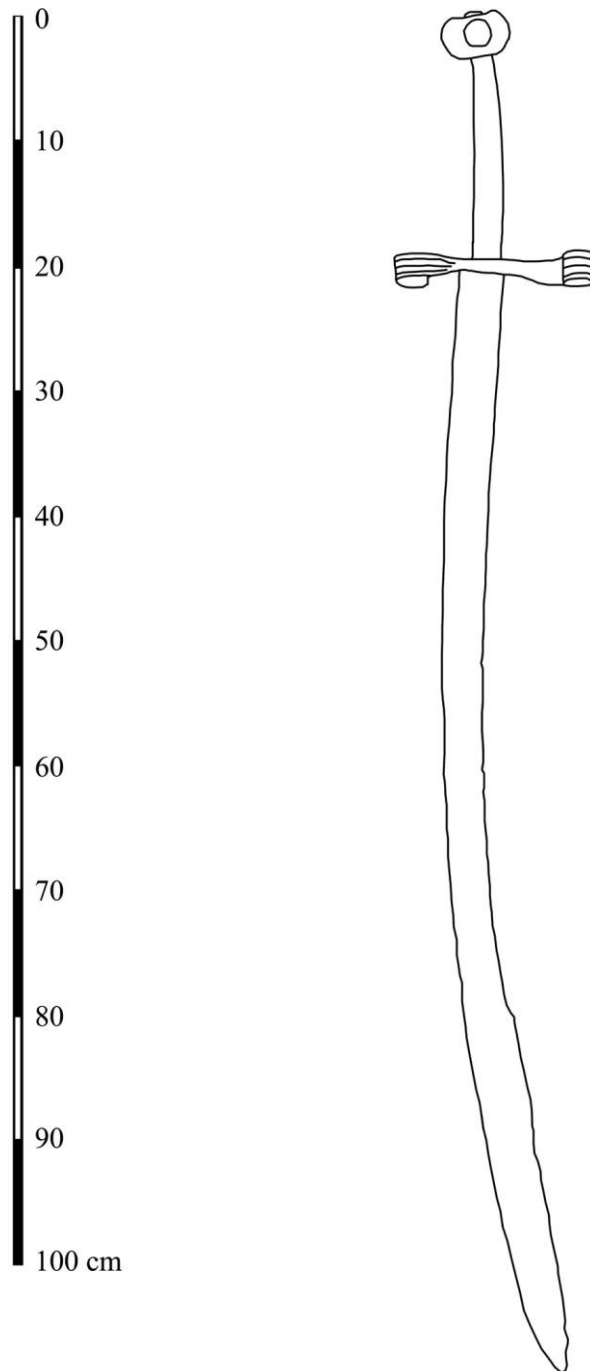


Fig. 11. Sabre, Hungary, late 15th century. Museum für Deutsche Geschichte, Berlin.

Drawing after Müller, Kölling 1981, 171, Fig. 33.

So far, there is no unified typology for late medieval single edged weapons like Lange Messer, although the classification proposed by L. Marek is noteworthy and seems very promising (Marek 2008, 38-41, 45-67). Terms like “Langes Messer” (long knife), “Großes Messer” (large

knife) or “Kriegsmesser” (war knife) are often used to describe these weapons, but opinions vary how to tell one from the other or how to classify any of them. To make it even more difficult, there is a wide overlap with falchions, malchus, sabres, dussacks, shorter knives called “Bauernwehr” or “Hauswehr,” and later on the hunting swords of the Renaissance. The aim in this section is to compare the pictures shown in the main Messer combat manuscripts, starting with the earliest known appearances and up to Albrecht Dürer's combat book from 1512.

The blades are fairly straight or slightly curved and tapering at the point (comparable to a clip point on modern knives). The back edge is blunt, very often drawn as a double line to indicate the triangular cross section. Interestingly, this fact is even true for the tapering section near the tip, so judging by the pictures, even the short edge is blunt. However, most surviving originals have at least a somewhat sharpened back edge, so the pictured may well be idealised.

The grips are one- or one-and-a-half-handed and feature an asymmetric pommel. All manuscripts show rivets at one point or another. These rivets fix the (probably) wooden handle scales to the tang of the blade, which usually is as wide as the grip itself – in much the same way as many modern knives are made. As a consequence of this construction, the cross guard cannot be mounted as it is done on a sword: the broad tang leaves a too small stump at the base of the blade to support the cross guard properly. Therefore, a guard spike, mostly shaped like a tongue or a mushroom, is used to rivet the cross to the blade first of all, but secondarily it works as an extra hand protection on the outer side. Hence, the presence of this rivet or guard spike, sometimes enlarged to form a plate or ring, is often seen as the distinctive element that parts the Lange Messer from other otherwise quite similar weapons. All manuscripts show a guard spike in at least one picture, but mostly the illustrators omit this detail for simplification reasons. In Lecküchner's book the spike ceases to appear after folio 12v – just like the left hand on the back, which is only shown in some of the very first images.

The cross guard itself is varying in length and shape. Lecküchner, von Danzig, the *Gladiatoria*, Paulus Kal and *Codex Wallerstein* feature straight crosses of different lengths, Talhoffer and Dürer draw wider guards with thickened or even cranked ends and Peter Falkner depicts a long bent hand guard at the front side with no equivalent counterpart at the back. Concluding, it becomes obvious that some blade and handle characteristics can be clearly

attributed to the Lange Messer, but there is a great variety of shapes, lengths and appearances for this type of weapon in general.

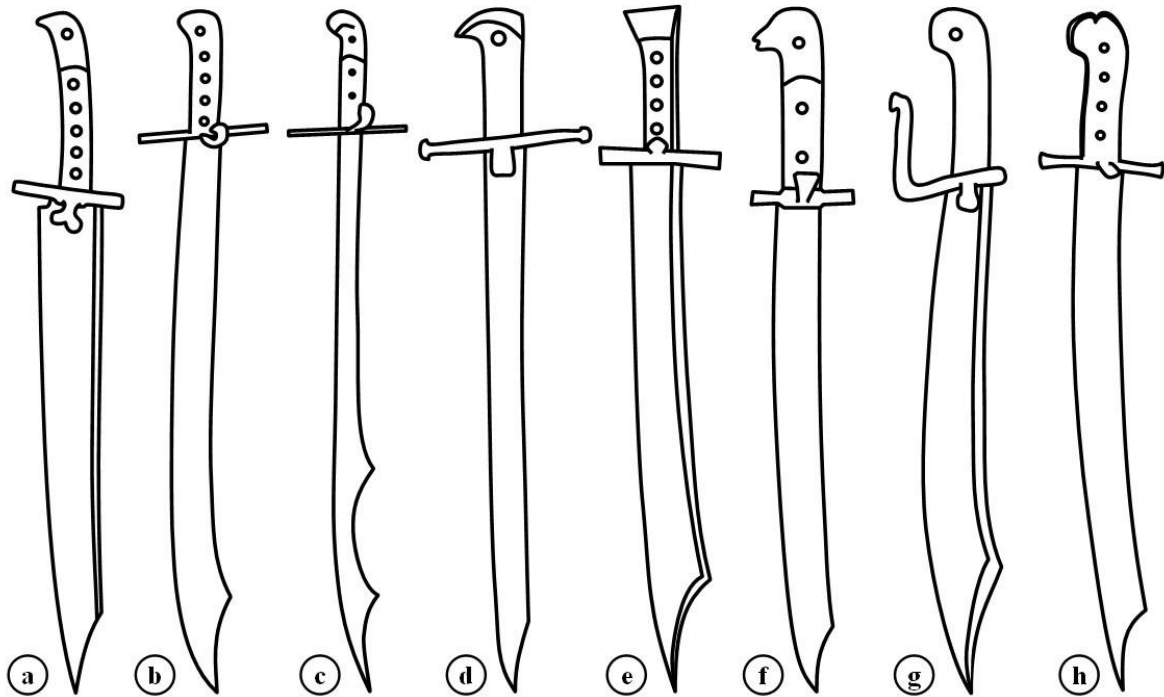


Fig. 12 Typical shapes of Messers (not to scale) depicted in fighting manuscripts

a. Ms. Germ. Quart. 16 *Gladiatoria* (before 1450)

b. 44 A 8, Peter von Danzig, 1452

c. Cgm 1507, Paulus Kal, 1460

d. Cod. icon 394a, Hans Talhoffer, 1467

e. Cod.I.6.4°.2, Codex Wallerstein, ca. 1470

f. Cgm 582, Johannes Lecküchner, 1482

g. KK 5012, Peter Falkner, ca. 1490

h. Hs. 26-232, Albrecht Dürer, 1512

The discussion on weapons could be supplemented with some remarks on the technology of manufacture. J. Piaskowski examined a specimen from Gdańsk (dated to the 14th-15th c., blade length 61 cm, hilt length 14.7 cm, weight 535 g) and found out that it had been made entirely of steel. The weapon was then quenched and tempered, which resulted in a high quality blade with the hardness of 348 kG/mm² (Piaskowski 1959, 173-174).

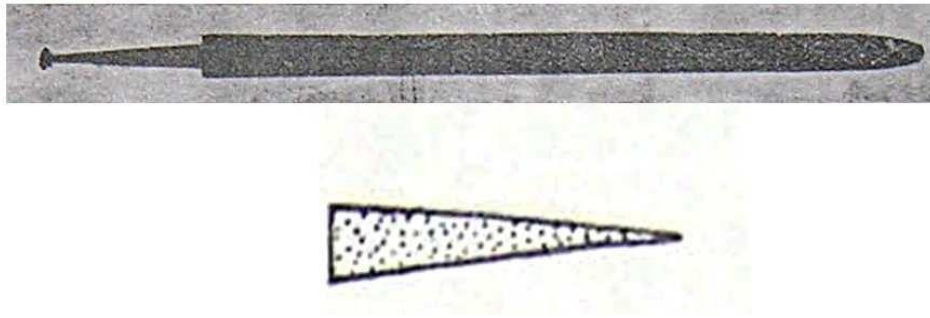


Fig. 13 Messer, Gdańsk, 14th-15th c. Not to scale.

Top – general view

Bottom – technological scheme

After Piaskowski 1959, 173-174, Figs. 120 and 122.

E. Nosek and J. Stępiński carried out examinations of a falchion (belonging to Type II), known as the Sword of St Peter, which used to be kept at the Cathedral in Poznań. The weapon is only partially preserved – the hilt is missing and the point is broken off. The total length of the weapon is 70.5 cm and the maximum width of the blade is c. 9.4 cm. Its present weight is 560 g. The crosspiece is short and bent down. The weapon is generally dated to the 13th c. (Nosek, Stępiński 2011, 92-101).

Two samples were taken for archaeometallurgical examinations – one from the edge (Sample 1) and the other from the back of the weapon (Sample 2). Concerning Sample 1, microstructures of tempered martensite, compact pearlite and small amount of ferrite were found in the cutting edge and side overlays of the blade, while pearlitic-ferritic microstructure was identified in the core. The hardness in the cutting edge was 368-411 HV, in the side overlays – 309-366 HV10, and 231-275 HV10 in the core of the blade. With regard to Sample 2, tempered martensite, compact pearlite and small amount of ferrite were found in the side overlays, while ferritic-pearlitic and pearlitic-ferritic microstructures were identified in the core. The hardness near the back was 385 HV10, in the side overlays – 341-402 HV10, and in the core of the back – 188 HV10. The blade was thermally treated after forging. It was slackquenched (rapidly plunged into a cooling medium and then quickly withdrawn) and thus partially tempered with the heat from the core. In result, a weapon with high functional qualities was obtained. The falchion was

forged from a billet of soft bloomery steel (0.2-0.3% C). It was then wrapped with hard steel overlays (c. 0.77% C), which formed the flats, the edge and the back of the falchion (Nosek, Stepínski 2011, 78-92).

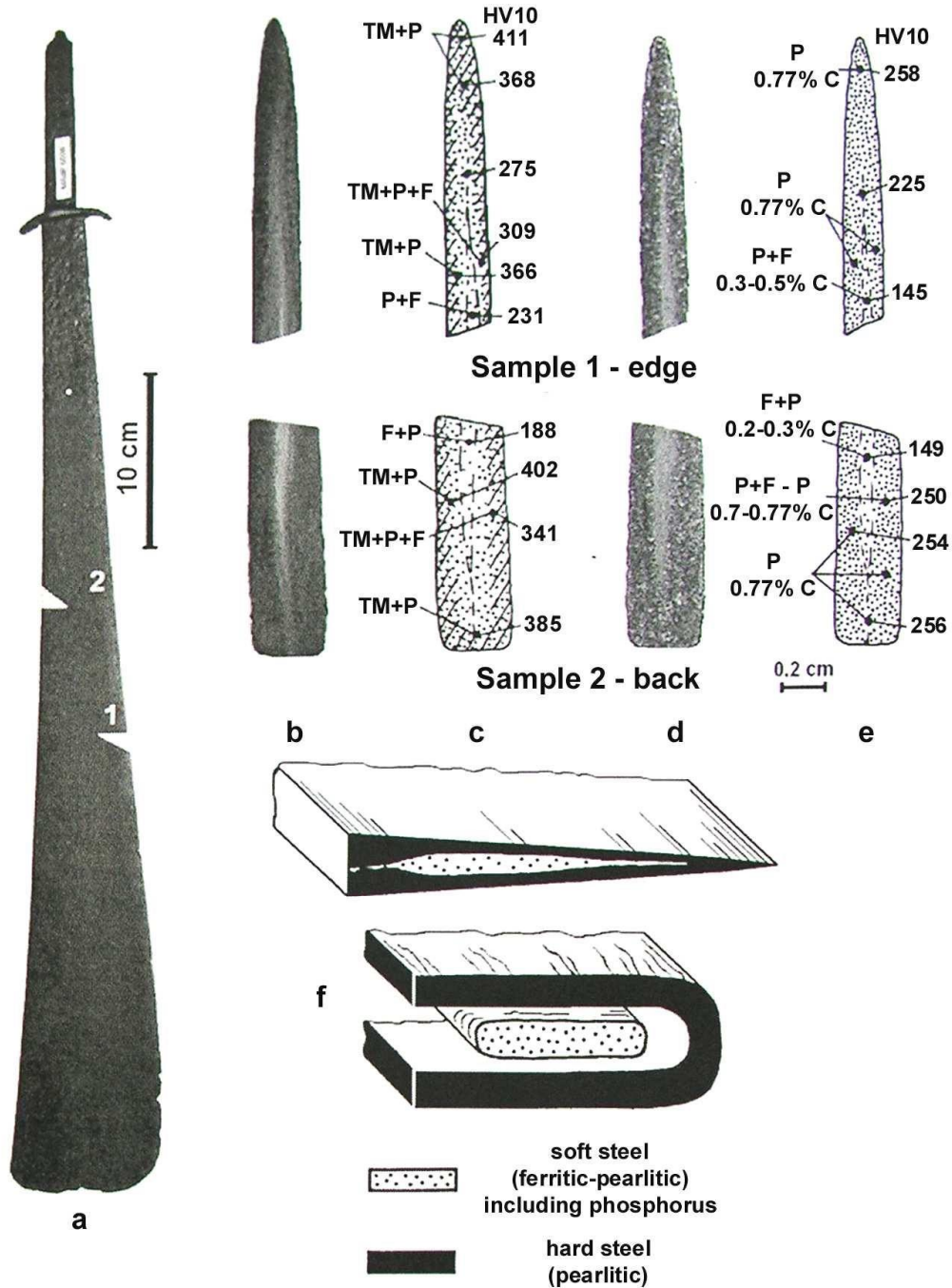


Fig. 14. Falchion, the so-called Sword of St Peter, 13th c. Archdiocesan Museum in Poznań, inv. No. MAdP 6606).

a – general view

b – macroscopic images of Samples 1 and 2, etched with nital

c – schematic presentation of the distribution of structural components and hardness tests (HV10) in the present condition. TM – tempered martensite; P – pearlite; F – ferrite; dotted areas mark the presence of carbon; hatched areas mark the range of thermal treatment

d – macroscopic images of Samples 1 and 2, etched with Oberhoffer reagent

e – schematic presentation of the distribution of structural components and hardness tests (HV10) after normalization heat treatment. P – pearlite; F – ferrite; dotted areas mark the presence of carbon

Difficulties in the Interpretation of the Techniques

Interpretation of the physical actions or techniques described in any manuscript of this type is inherently difficult, for several reasons (see, e.g., Forgeng, Kiermayer 2007, 164-167). The obvious lack of a surviving instructor of *messerfechten* from this tradition is a problem in and of itself, but that problem generates a cascading stream of pitfalls for the unwary. The lack of a continuing tradition means that any physical interpretation will rest upon a foundation of assumptions. Some of these but not all are inherent by the interpreter's field of expertise and experience in martial arts. For example, traditional western martial arts, such as boxing, wrestling, and numerous forms of fencing, generally do not adhere to a centerlinebased theory of tactics, and as such, the means by which they visualize space, and develop theories by which that space can be manipulated both for attack and for defense, can be stunningly different than martial arts from Asia in which dominance of the centerline is presumed to be critical to survival in combat.

Even more difficult than these assumptions, which can be readily corrected by means of a careful comparative approach, is a set of underlying physical assumptions or physical abilities inherent to any given interpreter. To speak in broad Piaget-based terms (J. Piaget's theories continuing to dominate the field to this day), children learn to move based on behaviours that are both reflected in their environment, and effective for their own needs. Thus, an adult interpreter who has grown

up his entire life wearing shoes that are heavily engineered, and easily six times heavier than a typical medieval shoe (to which our closest equivalent would be a lightweight moccasin), gets significantly different feedback from the ground than a contemporary pupil of the fighting system under analysis, and this feedback is reinforced throughout childhood by the movement qualities of his or her role models.

These issues span the entire range, from the immediately obvious, to the much-more subtle. For example, when one then adds the presence of synthetic materials such as rubber soles to shoes, and remembers, that even floors and pavements are a comparatively new invention, it is easy to see how 20th or 21st-century individuals generally have an entirely different “physical idea” of what it means to move and to step than our medieval predecessors did. It is fair to assume that even the brain’s ability to compute tactile information was further developed in medieval days and that visual input had a somewhat lower priority in everyday life, at least when compared to a modern upbringing in the Western world.

Less obviously, the medieval use of hose in male dress permits absolute freedom of movement in the hips, in stark contrast to the almost complete binding of the hips common in modern male dress, except clothing that is baggy or specifically designed for use in athletics. There is an entire societal assumption in the contemporary world, completely absent from the world in which Lecküchner lived, that men either do not, cannot, or even *should not* make as free use of their hips in daily life as women do. Thus, one will commonly see fencing manuscripts of the period depicting men in fighting positions, with the obvious assumption that these are positions from which one should be able to move fluidly while fighting, that in the contemporary world could not be achieved even on a static basis except by students and professionals of gymnastics or dance, who have painstakingly worked to achieve a level of flexibility that was likely never lost in the first place by the vast majority of Lecküchner’s contemporaries. An example of such a position within Lecküchner’s text can be found on 62rv, where the fencer adopts a position involving extreme “turn out” of the hips.

For the sake of those who are not students of movement, this is not pedantry. In fact, it cannot be *over*-emphasized, because every difference in flexibility, every change in how people shift their bodyweight in order to move and every unconscious perception and reaction to these motions, is a difference within which one approaches a text such as Lecküchner’s without the aid of an

instructor already versed in the tradition. Therefore, the interpreters' movement bias and spatial assumptions need to be explicitly noted in order to be useful to other experts: the interpreters within this work assume that the fencing actions described and depicted in Lecküchner's work derive from the following base:

1. Competent illustrator: The interpreters assume the competence of the illustrator, and that the images may usually be interpreted at face value. Therefore, wherever there are no obvious contradictions between the written text and the image, the interpreters will always assume that the actions described and depicted are both plausible and correct, and that any conflicts thereby rest upon the shortcomings of the interpreters.
2. Floating footwork: Movements depicted throughout the manuscript assume the proponents to be keeping a relatively high center of gravity in the body, with a tendency to "float," closer to that used by basketball player or a ballet dancer than to a low, "centered" use of the bodyweight such as is common within modern dance styles or in most Asian martial arts, in which one "sinks" one's body weight.
3. No centerline: The guards and actions depicted directly indicate that the centerline itself is of no importance within Lecküchner's system, although linear reach itself *is* of critical importance.
4. Power generation: This topic will be alien to those outside the study of the martial arts or dance, but within that context, it is a critical topic with which one describes the origin point of motion in the body, and how the body transfers momentum and bodyweight. Like more demanding styles of dance, performance of most traditional martial arts immediately falls apart if the fighter fails to maintain a specific method of power generation (for instance, a ballerina's performance will fail, instantly and potentially catastrophically, if she lapses into the power generation methods of a "Stomp"-style modern dancer while in the middle of a routine). The fencers depicted have the following common attributes: legs and feet often in heavy extension, shoulders generally, but not universally, in agreement with the hips, and a "pigeonchested" spine, aligned with the chest and belly forward (the latter notably so) and the buttocks somewhat backward. This latter is common in sports such as basketball and other sports in which players need to jump, and is compatible with the extended feet. Therefore, the interpreters assume that the figures are generating power from the calves and the midsection (but neither the junction of chest and shoulder girdle,

as would be common for savate, since there are literally no plates where the fencers are shown with counter-rotated hips and shoulders, nor the hips, as would be typical for Japanese martial arts and possibly the well-known system of Fiore dei Liberi, due to several plates within Lecküchner's work involving wrestling actions where the legs are static and power clearly being generated in the waist, such as 100v and 112v.

Any difference in base assumptions from this by interpreters of the text will result in a different interpretation of the actions described below. This does *not* mean that one set of assumptions is as valid as any other, but in the opinion of the authors, deviations from these assumptions detailed above will make it difficult to explain how certain techniques could be translated in detailed movements. As an example we can take the techniques of unarmed evasions against a cut and circling the opponent. A secure execution of both types of techniques require footwork in which the feet must follow the motion of the body, or else reproduction of the techniques will be not possible. In the first set of techniques, the fencer is almost certain to be cut by a competent opponent, and when circling, the fencer performing the technique will not be able to execute the extremely rapid weight transfers required to literally step behind an aware and competent opponent.

On first glance, not all techniques from Lecküchner's manuscript seem executable, not all instructions appear sensible or feasible. Even Lecküchner himself is quite aware of that fact, judging by folio 120r, which ends on "*the breaking is very bad and not the best, and if you cannot come any further, you can still help yourself with it.*" This is certainly not the kind of advice you would wish for if your life was at stake. On many other pages, the text allows the fencer to choose from different alternatives, e.g. on folio 22v, where several ways of harming the opponent are mentioned:

haw Im zu dem hals will du Im nit
zu dem hals oder kopff hawen so schlag In auff den lincken
arme oder In den pauch seiner lincken seitten grob vnd pew//
erisch das er seyn woll empfindt etc

The instruction says "*strike him to the neck. If you do not want to strike to his neck or head, strike to his left arm or to the stomach to his left side, roughly and peasantly, so that he feels*

it well.” In Lecküchner’s earlier version of the text, found in the Heidelberg codex Cpg 430, he is more specific: “*strike him to the neck. If you do not want to hurt him hard, strike to his arm. If it occurs at a ‘Fechtschul’ tournament, strike to his stomach to his left side, roughly and peasantly, so that he feels it well*” (the “Fechtschule” was an open fencing exercise or competition or tournament, held on market places and drawing much attention from the public during medieval and later times. The practitioners fought for showing off their fencing skills – and for prize money).

So, obviously, Lecküchner teaches techniques, which are to be adapted to intentions and conditions of the fight. The advices “if you do not want to do this, to something else” or “then do, whatever you feel like” are recurring throughout the book. Based on the stated example, it seems plausible to read “then do, whatever is acceptable in the situation.”

Lecküchner’s Objectives

It is important to note that all violence happens within a social framework. Essentially, practicing fencing derives from the need to prepare for armed conflicts. That could be wars and battlefield encounters which any man in the late medieval times could be subjected to, or knightly duels, may it be in the form of an ordeal or other.

The Latin origin of the word “duel” is “duo bellum,” the war for two. Wars require preparations, planning and logistics. The sudden ambush of a raiding party, even though brutal and fierce, is not war, it is a more primitive act of violence and crime (Keegan 1993, 121). In much the same way, duels are organised encounters. Both duellists know beforehand what they are facing and they are equipped accordingly, meaning equally. Most probably there will be audience.

Predatory violence on the other hand, e.g. robbery or rape, has a completely different setup (Miller 2008, 52). The attacker chooses time, location and usually picks an easy victim that would not give a fight, or at least not when caught by surprise. Elaborate fencing techniques do not apply in self defence situations. Even in societies where bearing arms is the norm, a predatory attacker will make sure that his victim is not on equal terms when making contact. This is not the type of situation the fencing books refer to.

In contrast to self defence, the primary goal in a duel was to rise in social status – or prevent dropping to a lower level. The fencers had time to consider the consequences before they met, so fear and concerns will influence their actions. Good fencers would be trained to deal with these emotions. To show one’s abilities in dangerous or even life threatening situations, the fencing skills, the tactical and the risk handling aspects of it, enabled the young nobleman to climb the social ladder, to promote himself as a leader. Many of Lecküchner’s pages need to be seen in a context of showing superiority and technical excellence, as for example folio 127v:

Item du magstu dich auch versuchen ob du Im mugst durch payde
wang stechen

“*You may also try if you may thrust through both his cheeks.*” Lecküchner writes and explains how to do it. If it works, it is certainly a proof of superior control over your opponent. The aim of Lecküchner’s teachings is actually stated in the foreword:

Ob dw wilt achten
Messer vechten betrachten
So leren ding das dich zirtt
Zu schimpff ze ernnst hofirt
Do mit du erschreckest
Vnd dy meyster künstenlich erbeckest

“*If you will pay attention, as far as Messer fencing is concerned, learn things that decorate you, that flatter in jest or earnest, by means of that you frighten, and awaken the masters skillfully.*” This passage is especially noteworthy, since much of the other introductory text is copied from older longsword manuscripts (e.g. 44 A 8, Peter von Danzig), which in turn source from the “Nürnberg Hausbuch” Cod. Hs. 3227a from 1389. There the foreword reads:

Das ist eyne gemeyne vorrede / des blozfechtens czu fuße / Das merke wol
JVng Ritter lere / got lip haben / frawen io ere / So wechst dein ere / Vebe ritterschaft vnd
lere / Kunst dy dich czyret vnd in krigen sere hofiret / Ringe~s gut fesser / glefney sper
swert vnde messer /

“This is a general foreword to the fencing without armour on foot. Regard it well. Young knight, learn to love God and honour the women, in that way your honour will grow. Train knighthood and learn arts that grace you and greatly flatter in wars. Wrestle well, practice glaive, spear, sword and Messer.” Here, the anonymous author emphasises a broad range of weapons to be used in war (and, by the way, teaches to *love* God and *honour* the women – do not mix it up!). Not so in Lecküchner’s version of the verse. The reference to war is lacking, other arms are not mentioned, the focus shifts to impressing the masters.

It is probably no coincidence that the shifting of focus from 1389 (Cod. Hs. 3227a) to 1478/1482 (Cpg 430/Cgm 582) happens at the same time as the heavy cavalry loses its dominance on the battlefield. Armies of heavily armoured noble knights start losing against regular foot soldiers. The charge of riders, the search for the decisive element in battle, killing in hand to hand combat under a knightly codex, are no longer successful (Keegan 1993, 297). The teachings of master Lecküchner are no longer aimed at the knightly duel or the ordeal to the death (which, as it turns out, were in the great majority of cases not that deadly either, but rather an authoritarian instrument to prevent uncontrolled violence and get the disputing parties back to the negotiating table, see Neumann 2010, 38). The prime objective is to become a controlled fencer of noble qualities, so that, at the occurrence of a duel, you can not only defend yourself, but also keep the level of harm done to your opponent at a level accepted by society. In many cases, inflicting serious harm or killing would have resulted in grave consequences to your own social status as well, especially when taking into account that the Christian ethics, which was the predominant moral system at that time – remember that Lecküchner was a priest! Only the highly skilled fencer has the ability to end a violent encounter without risking to kill or being killed by accident. Maybe surprisingly, learning to control the level of injury was even a valuable preparation for the medieval battlefield. One of the main objectives in battle was to take noble prisoners, which were held to ransom. Killing your opponents would not pay out. A well documented event in this regard is the battle of Agincourt, where King Henry V ordered to execute the noble prisoners taken in battle, but his knights refused to obey (Keegan 1976, 109), either due to moral or financial deliberation.

The difficulty when interpreting the texts of Lecküchner is, that it is unknown for which sort of situation the technique in question was designed. It might be copied from an earlier manuscript, where improving martial effectiveness seems to be of greater importance, or it might

be one of Lecküchner's own additions used for showing skill and superiority. For some of the techniques it is possible to draw conclusions from the context – but very often it is not or highly speculative.

Between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance

The historical fencing of today is heavily influenced by protection gear. Practitioners tend to loose respect for being hit, which leads to frequent “double hits” – both fencers fail to parry the opponent's attack and hit each other at the same time – without any injuries. Bouts tend to get hasty, the fencers aim to hit at any cost, elaborate techniques are often more an exception than the rule. The goal is to score points by hitting, and the one to achieve more points is the winner. This would not meet the criteria stated in Lecküchner's foreword.

Besides emphasising wrestling techniques, we find one recurring strategy in his teachings which he strongly recommends, e.g. on folio 35r:

du solt
wissen das die pruch mit dem langen ortt pesser seyn denne dy
vor gemelten auß den hewen worvmb dy hew kunnen sich
selbst vor dem langen ortt nich bebaren sy werden da mit
geprochen etc

“You should know that the breaking with the long point is better than the ones from the strikes described before, because the strikes themselves cannot prevail against the long point, they are broken with it.” According to that, the long point is not only the better counter against the guards, it is also the universal counter to the hidden strikes. The long point is done with a simultaneous conducted step back with the rear foot – which is an instruction not found in any longsword manuscript, but found in more modern Sabre fencing manuscripts called stopthrust. Keeping the opponent at distance, fencing with the right hand leading, is an advance to a more modern and elegant way of fencing. On the one hand, the Messer is an inherent part of the knightly weaponry and also the first blade to be fairly long and light enough for onehanded use, so the other hand is not needed to handle the weapon. In that way, the Messer is perfectly on the verge of Renaissance

fencing with the more modern weapons like the rapier. Lecküchner's emphasize of the long point anticipates exactly this development. Further indications that subtle hints at a new age have found their way into these Messer fencing books are blades shown in true perspective (e.g. folia 6r, 17v) and the final quotation in the letter to Elector Palatine Philipp:

Aristoteles in sua methaphysica

“Omnis homo naturaliter scire desiderat”

“Aristotle in his ‘Metaphysics’: All men by nature desire to know.”

The modern interpreter needs to include the social environments of the times regarded when dealing with medieval manuscripts. Arts and craftsmanship show that the late Middle Ages were no primitive culture – why should those day's have duels? How could a fencing master name and distinguish more than 400 techniques including counters, counter-breakings and counters to the counter-breaking, if most fights ended with one of the fencers dead or badly wounded? It is neither plausible nor supported by the text that disabling or killing is the main objective in the art of Langes Messer fencing. Throughout history, most morale systems developed by successful cultures limited violence among its citizens, despised those who kill and respected those who establish structure and prosperity. The 15th century fencing manuscripts were clearly addressed at, and sometimes also written by, members of the latter group, meaning the nobility, the clergy and the educated. For the interpreter of the old texts it is essential that in case of doubts, if the techniques do not work properly or according to the text, one should check for reasons in all aspects of its execution, in body mechanics and movement, keeping in mind that the average modern person is more limited than our ancestors were and uses his or her perceptual system differently, but one should also question the intentions – maybe the technique in question is deliberately meant to have a different outcome or effect than expected by the interpreter right in the beginning.