

General Description of the Techniques

Whether Lecküchner's manuscript is a fencing "manual" in the modern sense or more an "advertisement" is an open question. The social context and dedication of his work was already outlined and discussed in detail. To highlight is specially the exceptionally wellstructured contents, and it can be assumed that any contemporary competent fencer (which would at minimum comprise almost the entire noble population of medieval Europe) would have been able to learn the use of the Langes Messer from this text. Techniques are introduced in an orderly fashion, proceeding from the basic guards, to the strikes that "break" said guards, and into the techniques that can be applied during the resulting actions. Note that in Lecküchner's manuscript, the "techniques" described are only rarely a simple strike, but are instead explorations of higher-order movements or principles, their uses, and examples of what can happen when they are applied or countered.

The Four Guards

Since Lecküchner follows the internal logic of Lichtenauerian swordplay, one should not assume that the winning strategy in a sword-fight is to stand in a guard awaiting the opponent's attack. Yet, at the same time, guards and guard-breaking is prominently used throughout the Lichtenauerian tradition. How can this be so? The interpreters in this work do not assume that the opponent will actually stand passively in a guard position, but will follow generally-accepted principles and will attempt to strike the first blow. However, in real combat the position of the opponent's weapon cannot be predicted or "zeroed-out" to a theoretical neutral stance. The Guards *can* be interpreted simply as static postures (and Lecküchner does indicate that an opponent might stand within a guard) in which one might find one's opponent, or in which one might find oneself while being attacked. In a scenario in which two sides are fighting without outside interference, like in a duel, an opponent might stand still for a limited time. This is clearly unlikely under battlefield conditions once one is engaged with the enemy. So in the broader perspective of various violent encounters, it is ill advice not to move. The interpreters find this

especially plausible since, although the Guards have been introduced to the reader first for the sake of clarity, Lecküchner describes “Counters” *prior to* engaging in a detailed description of the Guards. Therefore, Counters are introduced, but Lecküchner provides numerous examples of how one can proceed depending on what actually happens once Counters occur.

This interpretation allows the fencer to engage in combat without ever having to engage in useless motion to “reset” to a neutral position, as might be the case otherwise, and, by listing strikes that *break* guards, Lecküchner demonstrates how to force an opponent to yield the initiative and engage in tactically unproductive behaviours. By doing so, the fencer can remain safe without wasting time on useless defenses, because the geometry of the space around him has instead been manipulated to ensure both success and safety (this is particularly the case when engaged in battlefield combat, where both multiple opponents *and* crippling fatigue pose immediate threats to one’s life). It also renders Lecküchner’s assertion that this system of fencing is appropriate to both playful and earnest fencing highly plausible, as the Guards account for almost all useful positions within which one might find oneself or an opponent.

Lecküchner describes four basic guard positions, of varying difficulty and sophistication. They are as follows:

1. Bastei (the bastion), in which the fencer stands with his blade inclined towards the ground in front of the adversary. This corresponds loosely to Alber in German long sword systems, or to “mezzo porta di ferro” in Italian systems.
2. Luginsland (the watchtower¹) in which the fencer holds his blade above his head, either vertically, or at an angle, threatening a direct strike from above. This guard is functionally identical to the guard From the Roof in German long sword systems or to an Italian Guardia Alta.
3. Eber (the boar), in which the opponent holds the blade horizontally with either the point or the hilt towards the opponent. This is initially similar to a low Plough guard, but has numerous applications specific to the use of a single-handed weapon.

¹ The German word is *luginsland*, which literally means “look at the land.” According to the dictionary of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm (Grimm, Grimm 1854-1960), *luginsland* was a 15th-16th century term for the most exposed towers in the lines of fortifications, which provided a convenient view on the vicinity and facilitated an observation of an incoming enemy.

4. Stier (the bull), in which the blade is held roughly horizontally at the level of the head with the point towards the opponent. This corresponds loosely with either the Window or Ox.

The Hidden Strokes

Six hidden strokes are named as the very first techniques, four of which are Counters to the Guards. Five of them have their equivalent in the German long sword system, one is unique to Lecküchner's teachings.

The hidden strokes are:

1. The Zornhau (the rage or wrath stroke) is simply a diagonal cut from high on the right side, dropping towards the left side, such as is made intuitively by an untrained angry man. It is aimed at the opponent's blade and provides a strong position to prepare for a thrust at the face, which is referred to as Zornhau-Ort or Zornort (rage-point). It is known by the same name in the German long sword.
2. The Wecker (the provoker or awakener) which breaks the Stier by offering a strike to the blade from above, followed by a step. The second half of the Wecker converts the cut into a thrust to the face while the opponent attempts to realign his blade. The Wecker is similar to the Krumphau in the German long sword.
3. The Entrüsthau (the indignation or disarming stroke) breaks the Luginsland by striking on a high horizontal line, so that the foundation of the Guard, that is, the threat of a powerful counterstroke from above, is immediately defended against while the opponent is simultaneously threatened. If the opponent offers the stroke from above, he will be cut, and if he attempts to counter the Entrüsthau, he has been shifted onto the defensive, and the protagonist remains safely in possession of the initiative. It is similar to the Twerhau / Zwerchau in the German long sword.
4. The Zwinger (the forcer) which breaks the Eber by delivering an attack to the opponent's face with the short edge of the Messer and maintaining the threat of the point down the entirety of the length of the outstretched arm. This is somewhat similar to the Entrüsthau

as it can be used to counter an over-aggressive strike from above. It is similar to the Schielhau in the German long sword.

5. The Geferhau (danger or way stroke) breaks the Bastei by offering a long-range cut in motion from above to the opponent. Normally, this would be what an opponent within the Bastei would hope for, as it allows the opponent to easily strike at the protagonist's hands. However, as the opponent moves, the Geferhau intentionally converts itself to a thrust downwards, directed at either the face or the torso, with the hands held high. This removes the target area of the hands, and the fencer within the Bastei is forced to either abandon his attack on the hands and attempt some other action (typically a thrust), or else to retreat. Again, this provides the fencer with the means by which to force his opponent out of his guard while not actually doing the protagonist any harm. The Geferhau is comparable to the Scheitelhau in the German longsword.
6. The Wincker (the waver) is a new element introduced by Lecküchner, which is used against fencers who strike at the blade instead of the body. It is performed by turning the Messer and quickly flipping the short edge down in order to hit the head or pass beneath the opponent's blade, either in a winding motion or before the blades make contact.

Lecküchner describes numerous other "elements" which are essential to maintaining the initiative, and thus, remaining safe, while fighting with the Messer. These generally either describe discrete techniques, or else cover principles that the fencer must be able to apply fluidly in order to function against a credible, competent opponent. They are:

Displacing (Versetzen) (34v-38v)

Even though Lecküchner advises not to displace, he still devotes a chapter to this element. First, he repeats the four hidden strokes that break the guards, informing the reader that these are the proper counters to avoid simple displacing, then he propagates the use of the "long point," the straight thrust at an outstretched arm, as the superior technique. The conclusion is that one should avoid displacing in the sense of a simple block or deflection, but incorporate a threatening action along with achieving control over the opponent's blade.

Drawing After (Nachraysen) (39r-45v)

Used against an unskilled opponent, one attacks by means of voiding (dodging) the guard-breaking stroke he meant to achieve, and attacking into the space the opponent's weapons inhabited a second before. This requires the fencer to have mastered the skill of manipulating fencing tempo, and is of moderate difficulty.

Overrunning (Uberlaufen) (41r-61r)

Overrunning typically involves halfswording (taking the blade of one's weapon in one's "off hand"), but its intention is to move inside the opponent's space in such a manner that he is unable to attack.

Setting Off (Absetzen) (62r-62v)

One sets off the opponent's blow or thrust by winding one's Messer in the path of the attack, typically involving a move from one guard to another (such as changing from the Eber to the Stier) such that the attack is set off its intended course. This is usually done with a minimum of force so as not to add momentum the opponent's blade that could be used against the fencer.

Changing Through (Durchwechseln) (63r-66v)

"Changing Through" is exactly synonymous with modern fencing's "disengage." It is used whenever an opponent strikes at one's blade (for example, if one is threatening a thrust, and the opponent cannot move his body out of the way in time, the likely response will be to attempt to displace the protagonist's blade). It must be done in such a way that the opponent is not able to seize an advantage by "pressing" or "setting" on the hands (see below and 104v).

Twitching (Zucken) (67r-72r)

“Twitching” is used against those who are “strong” (forceful) in displacing, and against those who like to “bind” blades together. It is simply allowing one’s blade to strike one’s opponent’s blade in such a way that the blades do not actually “bind,” or stay together, because the fencer makes a very slight retraction. This allows the fencer to maintain the initiative because:

1. The opponent perceives the blade to be bound when they are not (because the force of impact on a “strong” displacement momentarily dulls his sense of touch).
2. In seeking to bind or displace strongly, the opponent’s blade creates a non-aggressive tempo, giving time for the fencer to take an aggressive simultaneous action while the opponent’s blade seeks contact.

Running Through (Durchlaufen) (72v-102r)

“Running Through” refers to hand-to-hand techniques employed while fencing against opponents who trust more to their strength or skill at unarmed combat than to their skill at swordplay, and thus seek to wrestle, particularly those who use a high displacement or bind in order to enable them to safely enter and make a grab for the arms. As can be imagined, there are numerous possible techniques that can be employed, all of them dependent upon the opponent’s action. It must also be said that “wrestling” techniques are constantly present within Lecküchner’s system. These are critically important for “earnest” combat, at which one may repeatedly find oneself too close to make a powerful cut at one’s opponent.

Cutting Off (Abschneyden), or “The Four Cuts” (Vyer Schnytt) (102v-104r)

This technique is broken into two parts. The first two of the four is to cut at the opponent’s arm from above as he attempts to wind his displaced blade around for another cut. It cannot be overstressed that this requires good footwork, or else the protagonist will surely be cut. The other

two are to be used against those who “enter” (into the fencer’s space) while binding high. To perform these, one turns the blade and presses while cutting into the arms. These cuts are typically “diagonal” cuts applied with footwork, and because of that they can be used to counter the “Disarming/Indignation Stroke.” This allows the fencer to defend himself against a cut or grapple while simultaneously both injuring the opponent’s arms and drawing one’s point into line in order to counter further grappling (the opponent must either cease grappling, or else risk impaling himself as the price of continuing his technique).

Pressing the Hands (Handt Drucken) (104v-117r)

From any bind, the short edge of the Messer can be wound around the arm to cut into the wrist. This is particularly effective against an opponent who “changes through” (see above, 63r) in a sloppy manner. One thing that must be borne in mind in this technique is that the more straight the blade of the Messer is, the wider the “pressing” motion must be, and therefore the technique, if performed badly, can make the fencer vulnerable to having his blade taken.

Running Off (Ablauffen) (117v-118r)

In this technique, from the bind, one lets the Messer’s point drop, and weaves from side to side so that the blade is cleared, but so that the opponent’s blade follows that of the fencer, in which one can cut into the opponent with a “feint” (see below, 26v). **Taking Over (Pnemen) (118 v-119 r)**

If one is bound with one’s opponent, and both fencers have their hilts high and their points low, the following technique can be useful. From the hanging guard (see below, 198r), with the opponent also in the hanging guard, press *toward* the side of his messer on which your edge sits, and in that motion cut with the long or short edge into the opponent. This is not easily visualized without reference to the Guards, and is thus a good example for why the guards themselves should not simply be considered as static positions. When one is in a “hanging” guard, one can also be described as resting in the Stier guard. Therefore, if one shifts from one “side” of the Stier into

another with appropriate footwork, the fencer can immediately get past his opponent's defenses with a serious cut. If one has practice changing stances, a relatively complicated set of instructions can therefore be performed in one single, powerful move.

Going Through (Durchgen) (119v-128r)

"Going Through" counters "Taking Over" by withdrawing the blade with the point remaining low – making a "Taking Over" that counters the one being performed by the opponent. It is, however, clumsy when he stands hanging on the fencer's left, in which case it is best to counter by dropping the hilt under the opponent's blade while stabbing into the throat.

The Bow (Pogen) (128v-130v)

"Bowling" is a technique here the Messer is drawn in a straight line out of one's guard in order to shut down the line of the opponent's attack. The image in question is not a bow used in archery, but rather for a musical instrument such as a viola or cello, and this corresponds with the position of the thumb on the Messer as one performs the technique. The technique is not intended to be used as a static defense – for which purpose it is hopelessly inadequate – but to provide enough cover from an attack that a deep entry can be made into the opponent's space.

Messer-Taking (Messen Nemen), or "Taking the defense (Wer Nemen)" (131r197v)

Taking the opponent's weapon with the fencer's empty hand is a means by which a fight can be ended without bloodshed, and is not achieved with brute force, but rather by forcing the fencer's arm to move in a direction where it is naturally weak, so that the opponent has no choice but to release the weapon. Messer-taking, and the *threat* of Messertaking, is often integrated into other techniques.

The Four Hangings (Vyer Hengen) and The Windings (Winden) (198r-209v)

These are nothing other than the Stier and Eber on both the right and left side. Unlike the Bastion and the Watchtower, these can be used offensively while binding at the blade. From each “Hanging” one can “Wind” (convert from one Guard to another) to either direction, left or right, and by so doing one can perform all of one’s offensive techniques without giving the opponent the initiative while one tries to “buy space” in the face of an aggressive opponent. If the opponent fences as a “buffalo” (in an over-aggressive, unskilled manner), a simple winding from any of these hangings should end the fight. If the opponent fences more reasonably, then by using the windings as simultaneous defense and offense, the winding fencer is able to maintain the initiative. Note that the center of rotation when winding is much closer to the center of the weapon than to the fencer’s hand. This may partially explain the prevalence of a forward balance on early sabres, Messers, and Chinese *jian*, all of which are one-handed blades that make extensive use of windings.

As an aside, if one were to attempt to prove by physical means that long sword fencing derives from fencing with the Messer, the Hangings and Windings would be the most appropriate proof that one could offer, because while many long sword techniques within the Liechtenaurian tradition are somewhat abstract and counter-intuitive, Lecküchner’s techniques can be reasonably described simply as Guard changes with minor additional elements thrown into the mix. Almost every “main element” within Lecküchner’s system can be derived not only from the Windings, but from the fundamental spiralling motions of the body that result from the intrinsic asymmetries of Hanging and Winding with the weapon either in one’s right or one’s left hand. This does *not*, on the other hand, mean that one could learn to fence simply by changing Guard positions, although such transitions would be a regular part of the process of learning, because in order to do so *correctly*, one must have mastered all of the fundamental actions involved, particularly those involved in stepping offline. In the abstract, one could use the Hangings and Windings as an approach to understanding Lecküchner’s system. Mapping the system’s geometries intellectually, on the other hand, is a much different affair than learning to *apply it effectively*.

Additional Elements

In addition to the six hidden strokes and seventeen main elements mentioned in Lecküchner's introduction, there are numerous other elements and plays which are described, but which do not appear to directly apply to systematic swordplay so much as they describe ideas which are either broadly applied elsewhere in the Lichtenauerian tradition, or else are techniques that can be applied under specific circumstances. In this group there are:

Taking Away (Abnemen) (3v)

This is a “changing through” (“disengage” for modern fencers) when the opponent exerts pressure or attention on the fencer's blade, and the motion is above the blade – the text implies a relatively choppy or staccato upwards motion with the wrist, unlike the typically fluid movements usually used to disengage blades. This technique is particularly effective against a “buffalo” fencer, and the resulting rise of the point during the “Taking Away” can be combined with footwork to form an immediate thrust into the opponent.

The War (Krieg) (10r)

The “War” is a term designating the jockeying for point position while winding on the blade with one's opponent (each fencer wants his point in a position to threaten the enemy, and the enemy's point unable to form a threat). The idea involved is to be weak on the blade and to use the opponent's counter as an opportunity to launch another attack.

Doubling (Dupliren) and Mutating (Mutiren) (11r-11v)

“Double against the strong of the blade, and mutate against the weak.”

“Doubling” is used to deliver a second strike behind the opponent’s blade when he is strong in the bind. If his pressure is directed slightly off line the fencer can use that leverage to give one space behind his blade in which one can attack with a second stroke.

“Mutating” winds the attacking edge off the line of the initial cut when the opponent is weak on one’s blade, over the opponent’s blade so that a counter-thrust can be made. This raises it off the trajectory the opponent expects with his weak displacing (designed to take advantage of the fencer’s inertia in order for the opponent to crowd the protagonist). One mutates from below to go high over his blade, in order to “buy distance.” Thus, the initial counter winds with the hanging point, again equalizing the attacking ranges and weapon reaches.

Striking Around (26r)

Striking around is used for a second attack to the opening on the other side. When the opponent displaces badly or strikes at the blade, the impulse can be used for a quick strike around to the other side.

Feints (Feler) (26v)

“Feints” are false strikes used against those who are overly defensive. One deceives with a “feint” by feinting on one line, but then attacking in the same line to the opposite “peak” (a “peak” is a corner of the body, and loosely equates to the corners described by the opponents’ two hips and two shoulders). The opponent will make what appears to be a correct defense, but will be struck anyway, because the attack is displaced horizontally from where the opponent expects it.

Leg in the Scale (Wag) (84r)

The “Scale” refers to the position of the legs, loosely analogous to a “horse stance,” assumed by the fencer when he wants to perform a hip throw upon his opponent. It recurs throughout the manuscript.

Lame Elements (Lem Stuck) (184r)

These refer to techniques performed against the inside of the opponent’s joints, in order to cripple him, particularly the inside of the wrist and elbow. These techniques are not special in their motions, but rather specific in their intention. Lecküchner explicitly states that these are the elements one should perform if one has a clear intention to disable the opponent.

Additional Guards

In addition to the four guards described above, there are further positions that are also called guards or have a very similar function:

At the Shoulder (11v)

Quite frequently, Lecküchner advises to hold the Messer at the shoulder during the approach or when preparing to strike. Although this position is not nominated as a guard, it is used in the very same manner.

Barrier Guard (Schranckhut) (14v)

The Barrier Guard is actually called a guard in the book, but still it is not listed among the guards in the respective chapter. In the Barrier Guard, the Messer is held with the point towards the ground besides the leg on the right or left side. From there it is used to strike the Wecker.

The Speaking-Window (Sprechvenster) (28r)

The Speaking-Window is simply another name for the use of the long point (described often in the text), which can fulfil the purpose of a guard to keep the opponent at distance.

Elements with a Distinctive Name

Some elements were granted a specific name. Most of them are just referred to on that single page or they form a small set of techniques which includes the element plus a few counters or follow ups:

The Wheel (Rad) (66r)

The Wheel is a means of simultaneously cutting from below and stepping on one foot after the other so that one can continually harass with shoulder cuts from below until one is within range to threaten with the point. It requires excellent footwork, but if performed correctly, a over-hesitant or overly defensive opponent is forced to do nothing but displace or block while retreating due to the continuous stream of attacks.

Shooting In (Eynschysen) (90r)

This term is nearly synonymous with its normal use in wrestling today, and refers to the setup for a throw against an armed opponent.

Showing the Sun (Sunnen Zaygen) (111r)

This is the name for a particular binding element where one controls the opponent's body while pressing up under the chin into the throat with the Messer's crosspiece. Continued to the extreme, it functions as a throw.

"Freely Unbridled" (Frey Außgezawmbtt) (126r, 176r)

This refers to a fencer's response to having his weapon taken. Rather than attempt to recover the weapon, the fencer may instead, with both hands free, commence grappling techniques upon the opponent, both of whose hands are likely to be unavailable for grappling counters.

Stork's Beak (Storchschnabel) (189v)

This is a reference to the use of the outstretched arm in a thrust to the opponent. The idea behind the technique is to take advantage of the opponent's aggressive momentum to place the point of one's Messer in such a place that the opponent impales himself upon the weapon. This technique, with proper footwork, also counters blows thrown from the Watchtower.

Scorpion (Scorpien) (193v)

The "Scorpion" is a complex series of attacks with which one threatens the opponent's face by offering a strong cut, which is retracted immediately, in the hopes that the opponent will over-displace and be vulnerable to a fast thrust. If this is not successful, the fencer still has the initiative and can strike with the short and then the long edge at the opponent's face.

Basilisk (Wasiliscus) (194r)

This technique is fairly simple: when two fencers are bound at the half-sword (holding their edges in their off hands), and one's opponent disengages in order to thrust, one can simply drop one's body weight while raising the weapon in order to thrust directly at the opponent's face or chest.