On Armored Combat

<u>INTRODUCTION</u>

All of us have seen images of medieval knights being hoisted up onto horseback with a crane, or read stories in which a knight, once knocked to the ground, was unable to rise because of the weight of his armor. Such stories are a staple of movies and novels; iconic images on par with Sherlock Holmes with his deerstalker hat and pipe, and yet, ironically, they have no more to do with reality than does Holmes. While many kinds of fighting existed in the middle ages (see below), in this article we will explore the realities of lethal armored duels in the Age of Plate—the fifteenth century—by examining the evidence that has come down to us in medieval art, chronicles, and, most importantly, medieval books about how to fight called *Fechtbücher* or 'fight books.' These sources, particularly the last, give us far more solid information about how such duels were fought than we have about any other kind of armored combat and actually give us a complete and sophisticated martial art on par with anything from anywhere else in the world.

<u>THE FECHTBÜCHER</u>

Asia was not the only continent whose people developed structured, formal systems of combat. Asian systems are the only ones that remained in constant practice since their inception, but there existed highly-refined and sophisticated systems of combat throughout the middle ages. The European mindset saw such systems as superfluous in the face of changes in both warfare and interpersonal

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disputes so they went out of fashion and were largely lost. We are fortunate, however, in that many medieval martial arts masters wrote books detailing their arts; several dozen such books still exist today, and are receiving widespread attention from practitioners eager to learn more about how medieval men lived and fought (for more on this subject read: Anglo 2000).

The earliest extant fight book is from Germany and was written around the end of the thirteenth century by an anonymous German monk. This book, called 'I.33' (for the reference number at the Tower of London where it is kept) or the 'Tower Fechtbuch' is entirely devoted to the art of unarmored sword and buckler (a small hand shield) combat (Forgeng 2003). The majority of extant medieval fight books came from Germany, with a few from Italy and one from Burgundy (after the middle ages fight books from France, Italy, Portugal and England became common as well).

The most famous *Fechtmeister* or 'fighting master' of medieval Germany was Johannes Liechtenauer, a mysterious figure who lived in the fourteenth century and who was said to have traveled all over Germany and Italy studying with various masters. If Liechtenauer wrote any books none have survived, however he taught his students a series of cryptic verses designed to help them remember his art. Many later authors, especially Sigmund Ringeck and Peter von Danzig, wrote books that were, essentially, explanations of Liechtenauer's verses.
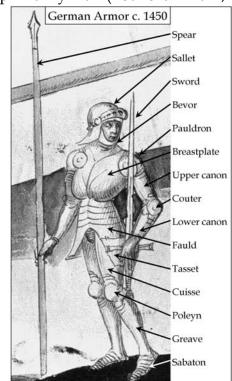
Medieval *Fechtbücher* are not teaching manuals in the sense we think of such books today. Most of them seem primarily intended as mnemonic aids for instructors or as advertisements intended to attract the attention of wealthy patrons to hire the author as a *Fechtmeister*. Learning a martial art from a book is extremely difficult, but it is even more so when the book in question is as vague and fragmentary as most of the extant ones are. Because of the very large number of extant German books that all teach different parts of a single art based on Liechtenauer's original instruction, however, we are able to use what Sydney Anglo calls a "dossier approach" (Anglo 2000, p. 184) to get a better understanding of the system as a whole. Many of the same techniques are shown in various different *Fechtbücher*, but each is presented in the author's own words or in pictorial form. With just a single source understanding a given technique might be all but impossible, but by comparing the same technique in different books we can often get a more complete understanding.

THE NATURE OF ARMOR

By the end of the fourteenth century advances in metallurgy, developments in proto-industrialization, and changes in the nature of combat had all worked together to change the armor knights wore from primarily mail (not 'chainmail'; that is a neologism invented by Victorian antiquarians who misunderstood medieval artistic conventions), a flexible mesh of linked iron rings, to primarily plate. By the beginning of the fifteenth century a fully-armed knight was completely covered in overlapping plates of armor from the tops of his feet to the top of his head and everywhere in between. What small gaps there were, for example at the armpits and insides of the elbows, were almost all covered with mail. In the picture to the right taken from a 1449 *Fechtbücher* by Hans Talhoffer called *The Ambraser Codex* you can see most of the armor that a medieval German knight (armor styles varied regionally) would wear in mid-century; all that is missing are the plate gauntlets that would be worn to protect the hands.

German Armor c. 1450 — Spear, Sallet, Sword, Bevor, Pauldron, Breastplate, Upper canon, Couter, Lower canon, Fauld, Tasset, Cuisse, Poleyn, Greave, Sabaton

While armor was certainly heavier than mere street clothing, it was much lighter than most people realize. One fairly complete (albeit composite) harness not too different from the one pictured above currently housed at the Wallace Collection in England labeled 'A20' weighs a mere 46.5 pounds; hardly the overwhelming burden popular opinion expects (Mann 1962, pp. 7-9, pl. 3). A modern infantryman carries significantly more weight than that going into combat today, and in the case of armor the weight is much better distributed over the body than is the modern soldier's gear.

Moreover, we know from primary-source accounts that knights in armor were capable of amazing feats of dexterity and endurance: "Now cased in armour, he would practise leaping on to the back of a horse; anon, to accustom himself to become long-winded and enduring, he would walk and run long distances on foot, or he would practise striking numerous and forcible blows with a battle-axe or mallet. In order to accustom himself to the weight of his armour, he would turn somersaults whilst clad in a complete suit of mail, with the exception of his helmet, or would dance vigorously in a shirt of steel; he would place one hand on the saddle-bow of a tall charger, and the other on his neck, and vault over him…He would climb up between two perpendicular walls that stood four or five feet asunder by the mere pressure of his arms and legs, and would thus reach the top, even if it were as high as a tower, without resting either in the ascent or descent." (Lacroix p. 146).

Medieval armored combat was driven by the nature of armor: The simple fact is that it was almost impossible to penetrate plate armor with any weapon used at the time, and this fact drove all of the sophisticated fighting techniques developed by medieval fighting masters. Not even arrows, often thought of as the medieval ultimate weapons, could penetrate armor most of the time; a full explanation of this topic is outside the scope of this article, but a careful study of the primary-source chronicles will show that arrows were used to dismount knights by killing their horses, to break morale by the unrelenting hail of arrows, to wound some knights who left their visors off for better vision, to funnel troop formations and a wide range of other purposes, but only very rarely do eyewitnesses record that arrows actually penetrated plate armor. The art of the period often showed weapons piercing armor with lurid depictions of flowing blood designed to appeal to a bloodthirsty audience, but, in fact, this was only done because the artist had no other way of showing a blow that had an effect through the armor versus one that the recipient's armor negated.

WEAPONS

The middle ages were a time of great experimentation in weapon development. By the fifteenth century, however, the weapons of formal armored duels held in Germany had become largely standardized. The primary weapons used in formal armored duels consisted of either the spear (or lance; see below) or the pollaxe with a sword and a dagger as backup weapons.

The spear or lance was one of the most common weapons of the middle ages in all kinds of armored combat in all periods. By our period the nature of the spear was somewhat standardized into two primary forms: the lance, a longer weapon used for mounted combat only, and the spear, a shorter version used for foot combat (and by lighter mounted troops). Lances ranged in length from eleven to thirteen feet while spears ranged from about six-and-a-half to eight feet or slightly more. In both cases the shaft of the lance or spear was tapered slightly from the butt to the point in order to reduce the overall weight while retaining strength. The spearhead was of steel and could vary significantly in size. The spear depicted in the armor picture above is typical of the period. Whether a spear or a lance would be used was determined by whether the duel began on horseback or on foot; both kinds of duels seem to have been common.

The pollaxe was, in my opinion, the ultimate weapon of armored foot combat but is today largely misunderstood. For one thing, most pollaxes

depicted in *Fechtbücher* have no axe blade, and yet were still called "axes" in period. Pollaxes with axe blades were also common, but for reasons outside of the scope of this article were less common in the *Fechtbücher*. Moreover, even when equipped with an axe blade the blade was more often used as a hook than for chopping an armored opponent because axe blades didn't have much effect on armor. The primary striking weapon of the pollaxe was the hammer head because it was the best way to transmit smashing force to the target. The face of the hammer head was usually carved with teeth designed to bite into the plate just slightly to keep the hammer head from sliding on the steel; this transmitted more of the force of the blow to the target.

In spite of the sophisticated design of the hammer head, pollaxes were essentially spears… with "benefits." They had spikes on each end which were slender—almost needle-like—because they were expected to be used against mail. A wider blade caused more damage against an unarmored opponent but the more slender points were better at sinking deeper into a mail-covered target, and the pollaxe was primarily intended for armored combat.

One of the first things one notices when picking up a real pollaxe or an accurate reproduction is that the weapon is distinctly unbalanced with most of the weight concentrated in the head of the axe. This means you can strike powerful blows with the hammer head, but when you do so your recovery time is slow and you are likely to swing well past your target if you miss, putting you in a very dangerous position. Using the lighter butt-end of the axe to thrust, however, you can move very quickly and with no danger of overextending. Likewise the butt end was also very useful for displacing swinging attacks made with the head of the axe because you could move it faster than your opponent could move the heavier head.

The spike on the back of the head of the axe was not, as many think today, for punching through plate. It simply could not happen; instead, these spikes were used exclusively for hooking. You could hook an opponent's arm to stop an attack, hook his neck to pull him over on his face or hook the shaft of his axe to disarm him.

To my mind the pollaxe is the ultimate hand-to-hand combat weapon ever devised. It leads to a sophisticated system of combat, and every part of it is designed to cause damage to one's enemies. Of all the forms of combat, pollaxe is the one which fascinates me most, and is the focus of my school.

The sword most commonly used in armored duels was called a 'longsword' in period although some people call them 'bastard swords' today because they were intended for use in either one or both hands. A typical example might be some forty-eight or fifty inches in overall length with a hilt

long enough for both hands with a heavy pommel on the end to balance the weapon. The cross was either straight or occasionally curved in the shape of an 'S' and was almost always of steel rather than the brass so common on modern reproductions.

People normally think that swords were used by holding the hilt and either swinging blows with the edge or thrusting with the point. Cutting through armor, however, is simply impossible, so swinging blows weren't used by trained knights; indeed, Ringeck tells us that those who use swords that way in armor "know nothing of the art" (Tobler 2001, p. 345). Thrusting, of course, was the best way to attack someone in armor, but since the gaps in the armor were fairly small medieval knights learned to grab the blade of their swords in the left hand so as to ensure a more accurate thrust; this practice is called 'halfswording.'

People are often surprised to learn that halfswording could be done with a bare hand, even on a sharp sword, and yet this was very common. Swords cut with a slicing motion, not a pushing motion; as long as you do not allow your left hand to slide on the blade you will not be cut. When I have a new student one of the first things I require him to do is to execute a halfsword thrust with a sharp sword into a solid target to convince him it can be done safely. The secret lies in how you use the left hand: It is used to guide the attack, not to add impetus to the blow. If you attempt to drive in with both hands and your point strikes a hard surface your left hand is likely to slide along your blade, resulting in a nasty cut. If, however, you don't push with your left arm and merely grip the blade just tightly enough to prevent your hand from slipping accidentally you will not be hurt.

This means that in order to attack an armored opponent you must consider your target carefully: a target covered in plate is ignored; one covered in mail is attacked with a solid thrust and then the sword is 'couched' under the arm so you can push with your entire body; a bare target such as the face or palm of the hand can be attacked without effort so couching is unnecessary.

While swinging blows with the edge of a sword are unlikely to have much effect, swinging blows with the pommel can be very effective and can be used like the hammer of a pollaxe to strike your opponent in the head to stun him or to the hands or feet to smash them. These attacks are done by holding the blade in both hands, but again, if you are careful not to let your hands slide you will not be hurt.

The weapon of last resort, in armor or out, was the dagger. The type most commonly seen in armored duels is the so-called roundel dagger which gets its name from the disk-like guard and pommel (although some English varieties had different pommels). The guard on a dagger for unarmored combat might be of almost any shape and still protect the user's hand, but the guard on the

roundel dagger was really intended as a push plate to help the user drive the dagger into the links of mail covering his opponent's openings rather than for protection since the user's hand would normally be protected by a gauntlet. Blade length could vary dramatically, but contemporary German art suggests a blade length approximately the same size as the wielder's forearm or a little more. The blades could be triangular, single-edge with a thick spine, or, less commonly, double edged, but in spite of the fact that the blades were often gripped in use the blades were normally sharp. Sometimes the points were thickened and reinforced to prevent them from breaking off in mail.

OVERCOMING ARMOR

If a medieval knight was so well protected, how could anyone, even another knight, ever beat one in combat? While the armor itself was largely invulnerable there were ways to get around it. The need for movement meant that it was necessary for there to be gaps in the harness, and a skilled knight could learn to take advantage of those gaps with carefully-placed thrusting attacks; in addition, the need to see small targets meant that visors were usually left off in serious combat which left the face exposed. A fifteenth-century *Fechtmeister* by the name of Sigmund Ringeck gave us a list of appropriate targets for thrusting attacks: "First attempt to attack him in the face, and also in the armpits, in his palms or from the rear into the gauntlets, or into the back of the knee, between his legs and to inside where his harness has its articulations because in these places it is best to strike." (Tobler 2001, p. 288).

On the subject of thrusting attacks, we also have to distinguish between those targets covered with mail (e.g., the armpits) and those not (e.g., the face and palms). Thrusts to targets without mail could be executed as "pool-queue" thrusts with shafted weapons (although not with swords, obviously), holding the weapon in one hand while sliding it through the other for a fast, powerful attack. Against targets covered by mail, however, pool-queue thrusts are of little use. It may be possible to break the links of mail with an exceptionally powerful thrust but it is not very likely, so while the point may cause some small discomfort or even a small wound it is unlikely to do much damage.

Fortunately, however, the *Fechtbücher* have told us how to attack mail-covered targets. Master Sigmund Ringeck said: "Hold your sword with both hands as described above. Hold it with the grip under the right shoulder and put the cross in front of the right side of your chest, so that your point rises up to your opponent. You should come into this guard from all three of the aforementioned guards. If you thrust to an opening and your point gets stuck in his armor, always wind your hilt before your chest and push him away from you. Do not permit him to free himself from your point, because in this way he can neither thrust nor strike." (Tobler 2001 p. 340). The reason this works is two-fold: First, your point becomes entangled in your opponent's mail making it difficult for your opponent to move your point away from him; his only recourse

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is to move either himself or you backward—hence Ringeck's injunction about pushing your opponent so he can't move free. Second, mail is a flexible mesh; unlike rigid plates, mail gives when pushed so when you thrust against it your point may sink less than half an inch through the links of mail and yet can still be driven several inches into your opponent's flesh because the mail gives while his flesh is compressed by your push.

In addition to thrusting attacks, some battering attacks done either with a pollaxe or the pommel of a sword could be effective as well, although they were never as decisive as thrusts. Medieval helmets were strong, but they were lined with very thin pads consisting of two layers of fabric stuffed with either hair (from cows or horses usually) or even dried grass. An extant example of such a lining can be seen in the Churburg collection on the inside of bascinet number 15. (Trapp 1929, pl. XV). In practical terms this means that while it was all but impossible to cut through a helmet, it was possible to strike one with enough force to stun the wearer. Other targets vulnerable to heavy, percussive blows included the hands, feet, elbows and knees (Tobler 2001, p. 358). The hands and feet were vulnerable because the plates of the gauntlets and sabatons were relatively thin, and sabatons were often left off for foot combat. The elbows and knees were well protected, but the lames of steel used to articulate these joints were relatively thin, and if they were damaged by a heavy blow the wearer would be almost unable to move that limb.

TYPES OF ARMORED COMBAT

People often speak of armored combat as if it were one single sort of activity, but, in fact, a wide variety of armored combat forms were practiced in the middle ages, all of which could be broken down as either group or single combat; mounted or dismounted combat; and as either lethal or friendly combat. Unfortunately, the sources we have give us little precise information about friendly or sportive forms of combat, and the majority of that deals with jousting, a sport involving the use of lances on horseback.

For those of us interested in armored combat as a legitimate martial art medieval paintings and chronicles of deeds of arms are insufficient as they do not discuss the practicalities of combat; they occasionally mention specific blows or thrusts, but almost never discuss how they were used. For that level of detail we must turn to the *Fechtbücher*, and since those books focus almost entirely on lethal duels fought one on one, that will be our focus here as well. For the sake of brevity we will also limit our discussion to combat fought on foot.

Techniques

A complete survey of medieval armored combat techniques in an article such as this is simply impossible due to space limitations; in fact, I have written three books on the subject, one on grappling and dagger techniques, one on spear and

halfsword techniques and a third on pollaxe techniques and I can not claim to have completely covered the art at all. We can, however, look at a select sample of techniques in order to get a taste of what armored combat might have looked like and that will be my intention here.

<u>POLLAXE</u>
"When one would give you a swinging blow, right-hander to right-hander. If you have the croix in front, you can step forward with your left foot, receiving his blow, picking it up with the queue of your axe and–in a single movement— bear downward to make his axe fall to the ground. And from there, following up one foot after the other, you can give him a jab with the said queue, running it through the left hand, at the face: either there or wherever seems good to you. Or swing at his head."—Le Jeu de La Hache, paragraph 4.

 In this technique your opponent steps forward with a powerful swinging blow at your head which you counter by taking a step forward with your left foot and displacing his attack with the butt of your axe just below and behind the head of his using a sharp, focused blow in an attempt to knock it out of his right hand. This is a snappy strike, not a heavy blow: you don't want to push your point very far out of line, you want to snap it out and back very fast.

 Whether he loses his grip or not, as soon as your point is back on line you simply thrust forward into a vital target (the face) with the spike on the butt of your axe. Le Jeu recommends a "pool queue" thrust in which you hold tight with your right hand while you maintain a loose grip with your left so that the shaft of your axe slides freely through your left hand.

 If he starts to back up when he realizes you've come between him and his axe after the displacement (especially if he's lost his grip), and so gets out of range of your thrust, simply follow along after him with a swing of your axe at his head as you step with your right foot. This is the perfect time to use swinging blows: when your opponent is out of position and unable to respond quickly.

 This technique can also be used against an attack from someone holding the axe left handed. As he swings, simply step forward and strike the back of his shaft with the head of your axe to attempt to knock his axe out of his left hand, then thrust with your top spike.

Hugh (on the left) and Dave (on the right) both start in guard.

Dave steps forward with a passing step to strike Hugh with an overhand blow and Hugh displaces Dave's attack with the butt of his axe. Note that the force of Hugh's displacement has knocked the haft from Dave's right hand.

Hugh now thrusts to Dave's face using a "pool-queue" thrust (thrusting with his right hand while his left hand holds the shaft loosely to guide the attack).

Dave steps back with his right foot to avoid Hugh's thrust, so Hugh passes forward and attacks Dave's head with a swinging blow using the hammer head of his weapon.
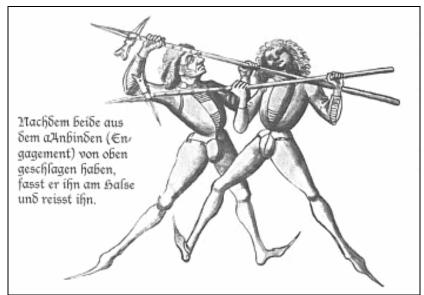
The same technique, but this time Dave is using his axe left handed.

Passing forward with his right foot, Hugh displaces Dave's left-handed attack, again trying to knock the haft out of Dave's hand as the picture shows.

With Dave rendered helpless by the loss of his grip, Hugh thrusts to Dave's face with a "pool-queue" thrust.

Nachdem beide aus dem aAnbinden (Engagement) von oben geschlagen haben, fasst er ihn am Halse und reisst ihn.

Talhoffer 1467, Plate 84: "Both combatants strike from above and bind their pollaxes together. The fighter on the left quickly disengages, reverses his weapon and traps his opponent about the neck with the queue." (Rector pl. 84)

In this technique your opponent once again strikes at your head with a swinging blow. You respond by stepping to your left front with your right foot and blocking his blow "demy hache"; that is, with the section of the haft between your hands. Hold your axe more-or-less perpendicular to his with the head of your axe pointing upward as you make the block.

Now step past him with your left foot, placing it directly behind his right heel, as you rotate your body clockwise so that you're facing the same direction he is. Keeping your haft tightly against his, rotate the bottom third of your shaft

up and over his head to place it on his throat, catching it at the "V" formed where your left wrist meets your haft. Push your knee against his knee (you are now in the position depicted in the Talhoffer plate above), and use the lower end of your shaft to yank him back over your leg to the ground. The timing of this technique is critical: Your steps must be done one right after the other with no stop or pause. Don't think of it as a right step and block and then a left step and throw, think of it as a right step then an immediate left step with the hand actions simply moving along with your flowing steps.

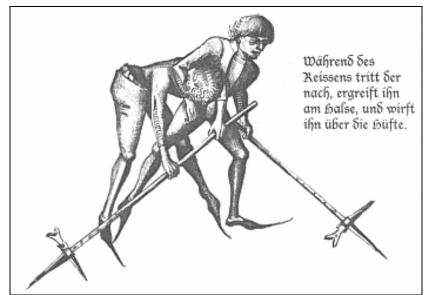Both combatants start in guard.

Dave steps forward to deliver a swinging blow; Hugh steps forward and displaces "demy hache" to his left side; note that Hugh has reversed the grip of his right hand.

Maintaining contact between his shaft and Dave's shaft, Hugh steps deep behind Dave's front leg, firmly placing his knee behind Dave's knee. At the same time, Hugh lifts the shaft of his axe over Dave's head and then places it firmly against Dave's throat.

Hugh finishes the technique by throwing Dave back over his leg.

Talhoffer 1467, Plate 85: "From the wrench, the combatant on the right steps forward and seizes his opponent about the neck and throws him over his hip." (Rector pl. 85)

This is a counter to the previous Back-lever Throw. As soon as you feel your opponent stepping around behind your right leg release the grip of your right hand and swing your right arm around to catch your opponent behind the neck, holding his neck tightly in the crook of your arm and pulling him firmly against your right side. Before his queue hits your throat you must straighten your right leg and rotate your body counterclockwise to throw him forward over your right leg.

To counter the previous technique, Dave releases the grip of his right hand and encircles Hugh's neck with his arm. He then rotates his hips forward while straightening his right leg to throw Hugh forward.

<u>HALFSWORD</u>

If your opponent displaces your thrust from below to his right with strength but continues to threaten you with his point then step forward to put your right foot behind your opponent's left foot (try to have your right knee against the back of his left knee) as you simultaneously move your hilt over his throat. Now yank him backward with your pommel and hilt over your right leg to his rear. This is another "Back-lever Throw", one of the most common medieval techniques.

On guard; Hugh will thrust at Dave's face.

Dave displaces Hugh's thrust to his right but keeps his point ready.

Passing forward with his right foot, Hugh maintains contact with his sword against Dave's to control it as he hooks his pommel over Dave's throat and, stepping behind Dave's front leg, throws him over backward.

This next technique is a counter to a thrust from above when you are in a "guard of provocation" designed to make your opponent think you are open to attack. When the thrust comes down, raise your arms to block with the middle of your blade. Now step forward with your right foot as you move the pommel of your sword forward and over his left arm. As soon as your pommel is in place, yank back violently to tear his left hand off his hilt, pulling your hilt back to align your point to a gap in your opponent's harness. Be sure to lift with your left hand as you pull with your right because this will cause tremendous pressure on your opponent's left hand and will strip his sword out from between his fingers and thumb; without this, you're simply fighting your opponent's strength, and that's not good art. From there execute a thrust to a vital target.

On guard: Dave will thrust from above.

Hugh lifts his sword to block Dave's attack.

Hugh moves his pommel forward and over Dave's left arm, then starts to hook it backward…

…Hugh continues to pull his sword hilt back and down while pushing up with his left hand…

...until his point is aligned with a target, then he thrusts up into Dave's armpit. This must all happen in one smooth, unhesitating motion.

DAGGER

Wieder ein freier Stand mit dem Schild gegen den obern oder gegen den untern Stich.

Start in a natural grip. As the thrust comes down, grasp the end of your own blade in your left hand and step forward with your right foot to catch the attacker's wrist on your blade between your hands; this is called "the upper shield." Without stopping or hesitating, wind the hilt of your dagger forward and to your left, maintaining contact with the attacker's wrist at all times. This will twist the attacker's dagger right out of his hand. Immediately pull your dagger back and thrust to a vital target. (Talhoffer 1467, Rector pl. 182)

They stand in guard

Dave attacks with a stab from above which Hugh displaces using the "upper shield."

Hugh begins the twist out. Note that his dagger is tight against Dave's wrist.

The completion of the twist out. Obviously, merely disarming your opponent does not win the fight; Hugh must now immediately thrust to a vital target or use a throw to take Dave to the ground and then stab a vital target.

The 'Albatross'; the name for this technique is a modern one assigned by my friend and student, Matt Lecin, because he says that as you do the technique you hang about your opponent's neck like the albatross in Hemingway's story. As your opponent makes a thrust from above, pass forward with your right foot or lunge forward with your left and block his attack with the upper shield as early in the attack as possible. Without stopping or hesitating, once the block as made continue the motion of your dagger up and over your opponent's head to place your dagger behind his neck. This will trap your opponent's dagger arm, too.

By this time your opponent will probably start reacting to your push by pushing against you: use his force to help as you now yank him back toward you to throw him. You should take a step back with your front foot so that the entire force of your body adds impetus to the pull; when he is fully bent over change your pull to a downward push on the back of your opponent's head to drive him to the ground. NB: In practice we have noticed that this technique is extremely difficult to do to an opponent taller than you are, especially in armor. (Wallerstein Codex, fol. 24 v.)

Hugh attacks with a thrust and Dave displaces it with the upper shield.

Continuing the motion of his block, Dave hooks his dagger over Hugh's head, effectively trapping Hugh's arm.

Stepping back, Dave pulls Hugh forward to cause him to fall. Once your opponent is fully bent over you should push down to drive his face into the ground.

CONCLUSION

I hope this short essay has given you a new sense of what medieval armored combat was like. This kind of combat may have no relevance to modern self-defense programs (although much of the unarmored grappling material in the *Fechtbücher* does) but it is no less of a serious martial art because of that. We study it not to learn to defeat muggers in back alleys, but rather to gain an insight into a proud and fascinating martial culture long lost to us. This brief look has not even scratched the surface of the art as a whole, but I hope it will whet your appetite to learn more, or at least that it has taught you to look at the knightly combat you see in movies in an entirely new light.

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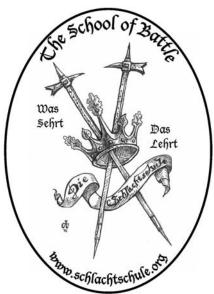
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