

# An Introduction to Die Schlachtschule

A guide for new students



# Learn the Arts of Knighthood

## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to die Schlachtschule: The School of Battle. You're about to embark on an exciting adventure in which you will learn the arts of combat as they were practiced by real medieval knights and recorded in medieval books. The first thing you'll have to learn, however, is to throw away all the things Hollywood and popular literature have taught you about medieval combat and get ready to see an art like nothing you've been led to expect.

## OUR FOCUS

Die Schlachtschule teaches the art of foot combat appropriate for a medieval European knight. Why resurrect these lost arts in the 21st century? Each student must answer that question for himself, but many of us have a real fascination for the Middle Ages and the knights who lived in that violent and bloody time. Martial arts in general give a focus and discipline to our lives, and medieval martial arts give us a connection to that culture, so combining those two things can be extremely satisfying.

Medieval combat skills have little relevance to the modern world; you will never engage in a real sword or pollaxe fight in the real world, after all. Thus, our goal is not – and cannot be – to create skilled fighters, because that's simply impossible. Instead, our purpose is to learn what medieval combat was really like and gain some in-



sight into how it was performed. In a way, we are like modern craftsmen who learn to recreate medieval crafts such as calligraphy, armor making, or cooking: we want to recreate a medieval art as accurately as possible in order to understand it.

The earliest extant fighting manual is called "I. 33" and dates from the end of the thirteenth century, which gives us a starting date for our study (although we don't use that book). By the late fifteenth century, the use of peasant foot soldiers armed largely with staff weapons (and not gunpowder as so many, even professional historians, mistakenly believe) had forced the armored knight from his place of preeminence on the battlefield. Since the purpose of die Schlachtschule is to study and teach the arts of combat appropriate to the knight, that serves to give us our ending date.



There were two main schools of combat in our period, the German and the Italian. While there are some gross similarities between the two schools, there are major differences of philosophy and approach. Many modern students of medieval martial arts tend to combine the teachings of both schools in their studies, but this, we believe, lessens the effectiveness of each, especially since some of their ideas are antithetical. That being the case, we have chosen to limit our curriculum to only one, and for a variety of technical reasons we have chosen the German school. Thus, the focus for die Schlachtschule is German Fechtbücher, or "fight books," from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

### THE SCOPE OF OUR STUDY

Modern fencing scholars have taught that the arts of combat as practiced before the Renaissance were crude and unskilled when compared to the supposedly more "refined" arts which came later, but nothing could be farther from the truth. In fact, medieval martial arts were refined, elegant, and comprehensive. They resembled the ancient Japanese martial schools in which the samurai would train in a variety of arts such as the sword, wrestling, spear, dagger, etc., to become accomplished, all-around warriors.

Medieval masters were just as concerned about having their students learn all of the arts appropriate to their world, including a variety of forms of combat from wrestling to daggers to swords to staff weapons, teaching their use both in and out of armor. Moreover, they taught complete systems of combat, not just disparate tricks; their works included instruction in the strategy and tactics of combat as well as the techniques themselves. Die Schlachtschule attempts to match those ancient schools by

teaching a complete system of knightly foot combat, both in armor and out of it.

Medieval combat could be broken into three categories: Bloßfechten, Harnischfechten, and Roßfechten, or unarmored, armored, and mounted combat respectively. Due to the expense and rarity of horses in our modern world we have elected to limit ourselves to foot combat at this time, but studies in Roßfechten are ongoing and we hope to add that our curriculum. Here's a list of the specific forms of combat we practice:

#### **BLOßFECHTEN**

Longsword (Langenschwert)  
Sword & Buckler (Schwert und Buckler)  
Grappling (Ringen)  
Dagger (Dolch)

#### **HARNISCHFECHTEN**

Pollaxe (Streitaxt)  
Spear (Spieß)  
Halfsword (Halbschwert)  
Grappling in armor (Kampfringen)  
Dagger (Dolch)

#### **EQUIPMENT**

You will need a wide variety of weapons and equipment for your training, but please understand that we require very specific gear. You are, of course, free to buy anything you want, but you may only use specific equipment from our list in class. Talk to your instructor about what you need to buy and the best places to get it before you buy *anything*, especially armor.

#### **SCHOOL STRUCTURE**

We have no information about how the ranking system in medieval German schools worked, so our system is based around that of medieval guilds. A boy would be sent off to apprentice to a master craftsman to learn a craft. Later, the apprentice would become a skilled worker and would be promoted to the rank of journeyman; still a learner, but able to add real value. Finally, when he had learned enough and practiced enough, the journeyman would be judged by the other masters in the guild, and if they thought him good enough, the journeyman would himself become a master and go off to open his own



shop.

Thus, a master in a guild was simply a craftsman just getting started in the world, not necessarily the modern image of a wizened superman of staggering insight and ability, able to leap tall buildings while uttering pithy sayings in broken English most people associate with that word today.

A newcomer coming to take our classes is called an “associate” of the school since he hasn’t yet really made a commitment. After training for some time (usually at least six months) the associate is invited to test for the rank of apprentice. This first test is fairly wide in terms of subject, but not very deep. The prospective apprentice is given an oral examination of historic and strategic concepts, then he must demonstrate the basic techniques for each of the forms of combat he has studied. He must also demonstrate that he has a complete set of training weapons for the forms he practices. An apprentice is given a black leather garter to wear below his left knee.

After several years of training, and after demonstrating sufficient proficiency in all of the many techniques of the Primary Curriculum, the apprentice will be ready for the journeyman test. He must pass a very extensive oral examination on historic and strategic concepts and demonstrate a very high level of skill in selected techniques. He must have already demonstrated the ability to teach a class in on his own and have demonstrated real leadership ability with the other students. Finally, he must have a complete set of weapons and equipment. A journeyman is given a green leather garter to wear below his left knee.

The test for master requires the candidate to demonstrate a very high level of proficiency in our Secondary Curriculum. In addition, the student must demonstrate the ability to fight successfully in armor, and he must provide some new contribution to the knowledge of our art. He must also have not only a full set of equipment, to include a full suit of armor, but have enough extra equipment that he could start his own class. Finally, he must demonstrate the ability to run a school of his own without direct supervision. A master is given a white leather garter to wear below his left knee.

### **OUR FECHTMEISTER**

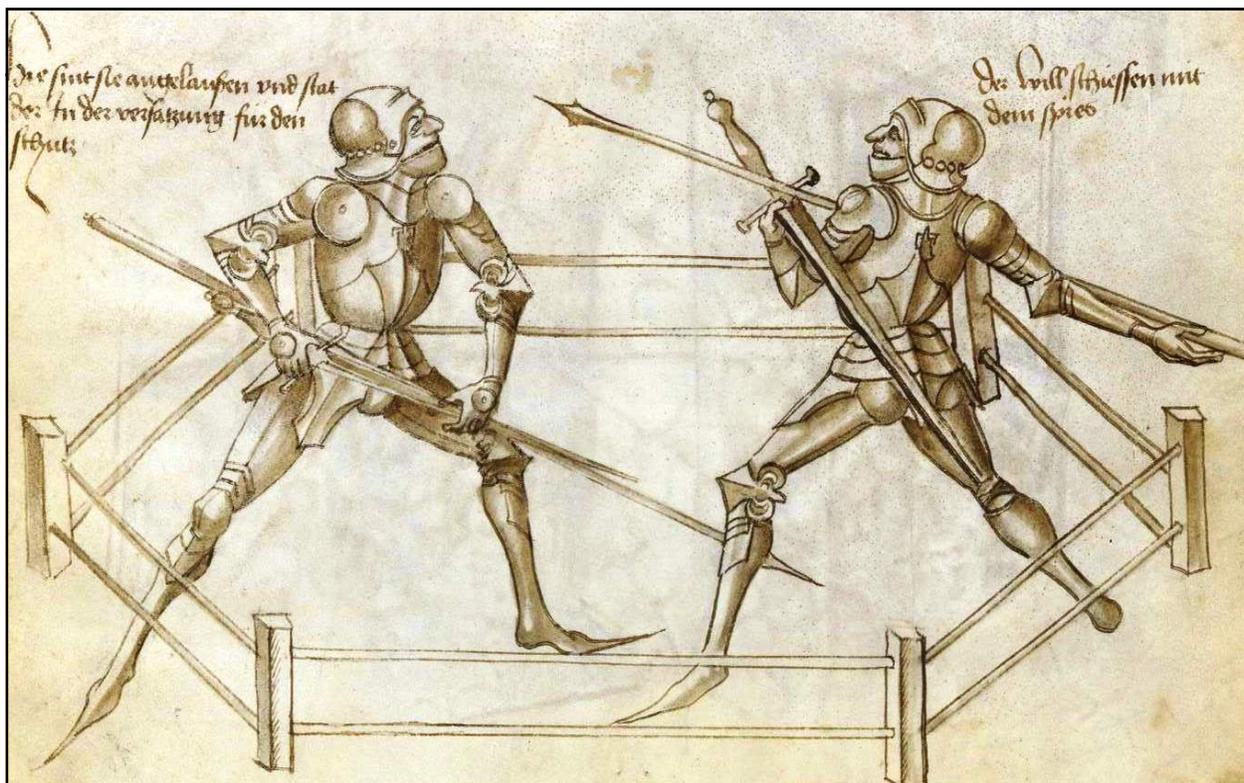
A Fechtmeister or “fight master” is the head of a school of combat. Our Fechtmeister, Hugh Knight, has been studying medieval history and culture for more than twenty-five years, especially the combat arts. He collects medieval artifacts and reproductions, especially armor and weapons, and practices many of the skills appertaining to medieval knighthood, including falconry, hunting, and,



of course, medieval combat. Mr. Knight started his martial journey as a boy with traditional Japanese swordsmanship and jujutsu, and his study of medieval combat began more than twenty years ago and has continued ever since. He found die Schlachtschule in 2003, and has published numerous books and articles on medieval combat since that time.

#### CLASS RULES:

- ◆ We are all training in an art reserved for gentleman and warriors, and all students will behave in accordance with these ideals at all times.
- ◆ All students will salute their training partners before each round of practice.
- ◆ All students will acquire the uniform of the school as soon as possible and will wear it correctly in each class. The uniform consists of a black V-necked Taekwondo gi jacket hemmed to waist length, black or navy blue sweat pants, and dark sneakers (more elaborate types of practice jackets may be approved on a case-by-case basis). The uniform must be neat, clean, and in good repair.
- ◆ All techniques must be performed safely and responsibly.
- ◆ No students will engage in free bouts without the Fechtmeister's permission, and when doing so will limit themselves to the equipment, forms, and types of bouts approved by the School.
- ◆ All students must inform the instructor if they are unable to attend class.



## LOCATIONS AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Die Schlachtschule has two locations: The main school meets in San Bernardino, California, but we also have a branch location in Canberra, Australia. Contact the addresses listed below for class times and locations.

### SAN BERNARDINO:

Hugh Knight                      [hughk1066@juno.com](mailto:hughk1066@juno.com)

### CANBERRA:

Cornelius Weber                [Corneliusvonbecke@mac.com](mailto:Corneliusvonbecke@mac.com)

### OTHER RESOURCES:

On the web:                      [www.schlachtschule.org](http://www.schlachtschule.org)

Facebook:                        [www.facebook.com/groups/131264310251664/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/131264310251664/)

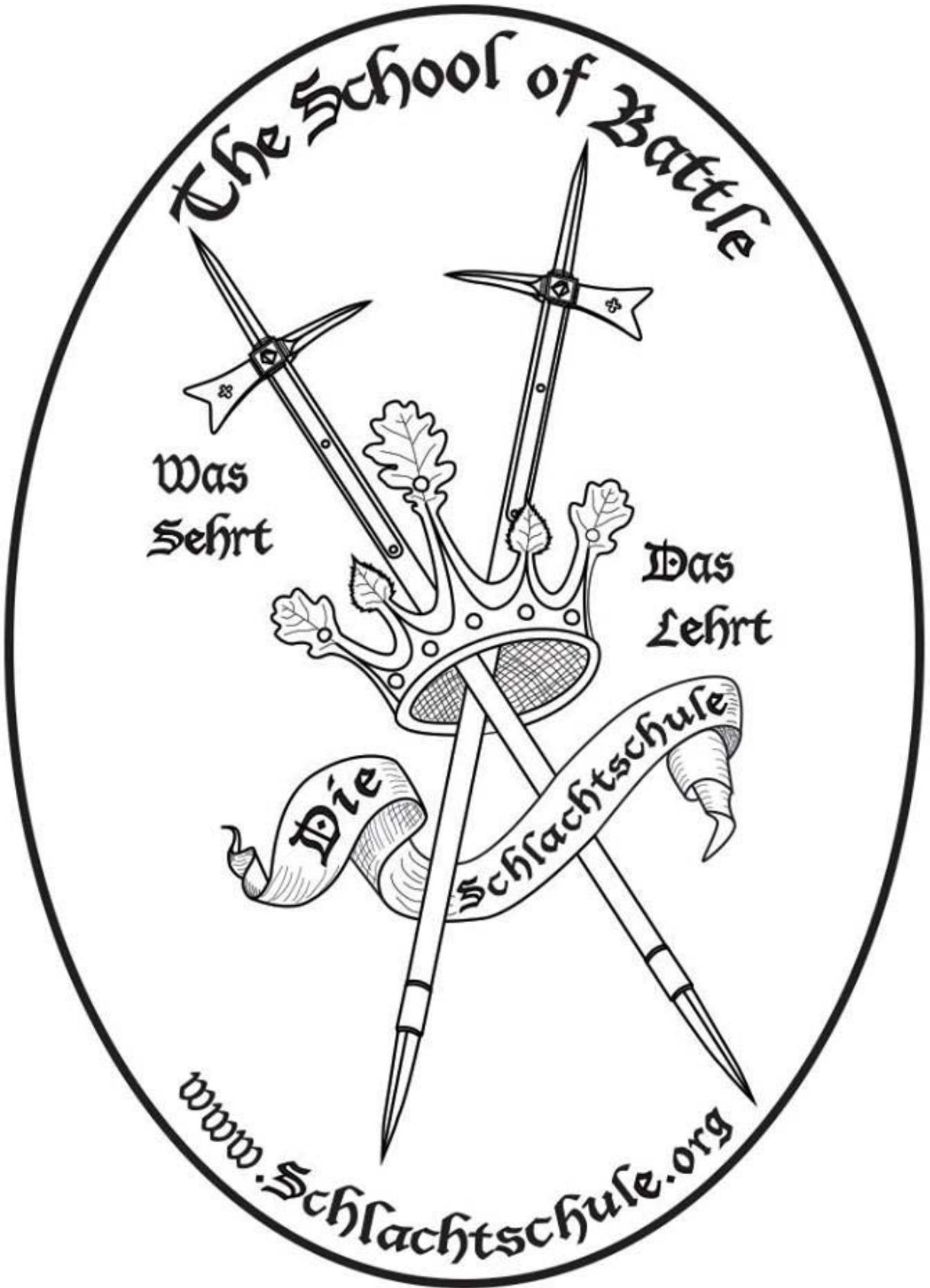
Hugh Knight's blog:            [talhoffer.blogspot.com/](http://talhoffer.blogspot.com/)

Hugh Knight's books:         [www.lulu.com/spotlight/hughknight](http://www.lulu.com/spotlight/hughknight)

DSS Merchandise:             [www.cafepress.com/schlachtschule](http://www.cafepress.com/schlachtschule)



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