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And in War Brings Honor

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By

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Preface

The original inspiration for this project arose out of my involvement with the Historical European Martial Arts community, and my effort and training to learn the fighting styles described in the manuals of the Holy Roman Empire, among others. In 2013, when I first started learning HEMA (at the time, fencing in the style of 16th century Italian Rapier) I already had a pretty good idea that my continuing academic career was going to focus on History. By my first year of college in 2014, when I started expanding my studies to 15th century German Longsword, that idea had not changed. Despite some brief forays into World War II and other historical periods, the Middle Ages and early Renaissance remained my chief area of interest. By the time I had officially moderated into History, my interest in historical fencing remained very strong. When the time came for me to start considering what my Senior Project was going to be about, my canned answer was "I don't know, something about swords I guess…"

So, in the Summer of 2017 when I sat down to formulate a strong, concrete idea for a project, I realized that despite my study of the fighting and the sources in HEMA, if someone had asked me how the fighting and instructional manuals related to the society that created them, I would not have been able to answer. There, I thought, was my project: describing the context surrounding this written swordplay tradition in a thorough fashion, so that anyone who studied the manuals could refer to this to understand how exactly these texts related to the history at large.

In pursuit of this idea, I first had to learn many things that I hadn't realized I didn't know when I started the project. I had to learn and explain how the culture and government of the Empire worked. I had to figure out how bearing arms related to self-defense, how self-defense related to communal defense, and understand how these rights related to other rights and the social makeup surrounding towns and villages at large. The sheer scope of the knowledge I lacked was intimidating, but luckily for me I assembled a bibliography of books with rather elegant explanations that, with the help of Professor Alice Stroup, I was

able to piece together into an understandable summary. The project became less about the texts that were my original inspiration, and more about the increasingly compelling Martial Culture which illuminated itself in bits and pieces in brief mentions in books about the economics of urban communes, or as relatively minor chapters about militia in medieval warfare books mainly concerned with knights and mercenaries.

This shift in priorities made me realize how confusing the texts had become. The connections between the texts and the culture I expected to find failed to materialize as I continued to study the subject, and by February, Mike Edelson, the chief instructor of the HEMA club to which I belong, became convinced that the fencing described in the texts we studied was not what we thought it was. By that point, I was not surprised by this idea, and I realized that the difficulty I was having connecting the texts to what had become the subject of my project was not because I had somehow overlooked an important facet of research, but because in fact the connections I expected to see were not there. The swordplay I practiced seemed to have an extremely tenuous connection to the Martial Culture I had been researching since September.

Ultimately, this is a project about two things: Firstly, the Martial Culture of the Holy Roman Empire, the scale and importance of which was absolutely beyond my comprehension at the outset of this project. Secondly, the utterly confounding scale of my misapprehension concerning the relationship that the German written tradition of armed combat had to 15th century reality, and what that might mean. Of course, if there's one thing more exciting in History than discovering that you're correct, it's discovering that you're wrong.

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Introduction

As the Middle Ages gave way to the Renaissance, societies throughout Europe were undergoing dramatic changes, creating many systems and institutions which would be foundational for the western world we know today. The power of the nobility waned, and systems of rights that were not contingent on nobility of birth paved the way for the predecessors to modern notions of civic freedom. The law codes of urban communes of the Holy Roman Empire in the 15th century show many of these communal rights and laws in stark detail, creating social orders that organized the community for the benefit of itself and its citizens.

The functions of these rights are very well illustrated by the right to bear arms in these societies, ensuring the independent defense of the community, and the capability of individual citizens to protect life and prosperity. Professor B. Ann Tlusty in *The Martial Ethic in Early Modern Germany; Civic Duty and the Rights of Arms,* describes in explicit terms a "Weapons culture associated with notions of householding, citizenship, and the martial ethic.[1]" This Martial Culture, apparently created as a system of military utility and defense, created an environment of social violence away from the battlefield by making Martial capability central to male citizen identity. This created a social role for weapons outside of the hands of soldiers and warfare.

In the Holy Roman Empire of the 15th century, this code of martial virtue and obligation applied nearly universally to the men of the citizen class and defined their social and civic role within their communities, and it ensured that rising egalitarian and semi-democratic ideals were strongly defended by an armed population. Previous law codes covered the rights to self-defense and the conditions of bearing arms, and in fact militia and levies had served in all the wars in the Middle Ages. However, from the mid-14th

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[1] Tlusty, *The Martial Ethic in Early Modern Germany,* 2.

through the 15th century the rising middle class partially replaces the nobility as executors of military power, in doing so they made the military capability of a community and its population communal removing it from u the authority of a local nobleman or ecclesiastical authority. This had interesting effects on the role of violence and the application of force legally, militarily, and socially, because the role of communal self-defense is affected by changing ideas of liberty and power in the early modern world.

Since the 13th century, Imperial authority had eroded, and the ability of the Emperor to guarantee the policing and safety of the many communities of the Empire could no longer be depended upon. This rendered the world in which these people lived their lives chaotic and turbulent, while at the same time the relative freedom from regulation created an upswing of commerce and culture, contributing to a rise in the power of the middle class. This rise in power and reduced dependence on the centralized power of the throne emphasized the role of the citizen in communal and personal security, and this responsibility to participate in the activities of civic defense, training martial ability, possession of weapons, and readiness to face combat became a significant cultural component of masculine citizen identity. Throughout the Empire, settlements, villages, and cities tied the responsibility of arms inexorably to the exchange of citizen rights and privileges, making the martial capability of their inhabitants an inseparable component of their identity.

On the other hand, the fact that no controlling authority had a monopoly on the deployment of force, compelling the non-military classes to exercise their own authority over armed violence, brought a culture of arms and armed violence further into the public sphere, where it became a factor in the day to day lives of the citizenry in two forms: formal social combat, the duel, and Informal social combat, called the rencounter. The expectation to hold one's ground when challenged by a peer was a strong social expectation placed upon men, and as such execution of martial ability became a signifier of virility and manliness. Willingness to defend oneself in the event of an assault upon the physical body or social reputation became an obligation, even when the written law began to turn against the rencounter and the duel. Engagement in

armed combat with peers became a performative action, a reaffirmation of one's adherence to the obligations which were said to keep the community safe.

The Martial Culture of the 15th century Empire was strongly related to the changing social landscape, and the forms and purpose of the Martial Culture strongly reflects Early Modern ideas of communal governance, the decline of the nobility, and early ideas of personal liberty and freedom, and how personal liberty was entwined with communal obligation and service. It also tells us about the relationship that the population had to violent conflict, both on and off the battlefield, and the social role their involvement in this combat had. Also apparent is a rising division between the social sphere of violence and the military one, with the weapons used in each becoming less and less similar as dueling took on a style of its own, divorced from warfare, creating a separate civilian Martial Culture.

In an examination of this phenomenon, it is necessary to understand the political context of the time in both the urban and rural communes of the Holy Roman Empire in and around the 15th century. Aside from the "big picture" of political and social geography, the personal details of combat in the 15th century Holy Roman Empire are illuminated by Fechtbuch (Fight Books) and other martial primary sources from the period. This will include the glosses of Johannes Lichtenauer's Zedel (recital) and Pietro Monte's *Exercitiorum Atque Artis Militaris Collectanea*, which describes in broad detail the fighting equipment and training of medieval combatants, among other things. The writings of Nicolò Machiavelli on the merits of Citizen Militias will shed light on the social militarism of the Martial citizen. Examination of the form of the 15th century weapon both on and off the battlefield, and its relationship to function, will illuminate the practical concerns which were significant to the combatants when selecting their tools. The Author's personal experience with reconstructed fighting arts will serve as an experimental testing and analysis of these fighting arts, and how their shape and style inform us about their nature in the day they were used.

Notes on terms of geography

A fundamental difference exists between modern notions of political geography and Medieval and Early modern notions, and as such there is no easy way to explain the extent of the Empire in modern terms. The chief difference is that political authority was not geographical in nature in the 15th century as it might be today. Instead, the extent of influence was determined by interconnected structures of power based around individuals and groups of individuals rather than on borders and provinces.[2] A result of this is that residents of the Empire did not consider the areas in which they lived to be geographically bounded except by natural barriers such as rivers. In practice, jurisdictions did have geographical limits, but they were blurry and constantly in flux. Not only that, but the regions under the control of the Empire do not fit neatly into modern borders, and as such references to certain laws and cultures of specific modern locations such as "Germany" or "Austria" should be considered generalizations for the sake of convenience, and not strict definitions of geography.

Accordingly, laws in this period are more properly interpreted to be connected to the community rather than the land. Considering cultures and laws to be restricted to geographically-bounded regions in the fashion of modern nation states can be helpful in a broad sense, but it will be important to keep in mind that the nature of the Empire is not equivalent to the nation state when a community is studied in detail.

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[2] Wilson, *Heart of Europe.*

Notes on Classifications of Arms.

Much of this paper is concerned with the weapons and arms of the 15th century, both on and off the battlefield. I will use an easy system of classification for these tools to avoid getting stymied in details which are not relevant to the point being made. Medieval weapons are exceedingly varied, and as we will cover later, much work has been done defining such weapons and classifying them into types according to period and function. This level of detail will be examined when necessary, but for the paper at large I will be using the following system to classify the objects to which I refer.

15th century armaments at the broadest level fall into three categories, their defining features chiefly being their relation to the wielder and potential targets rather than their characteristics in isolation. The three categories are based on the equipment carried most commonly by a medieval soldier outfitted for war, as seen in this illustration from the Codex Wallerstein, a 15th century fighting manual:

Figure 1 Two armored combatants from the Codex Wallerstein[3]

Note that each combatant carries three weapons. This is the basis for my system, which divides weapons into Utility weapons, Personal weapons, and Field weapons. Utility weapons are essentially personal tools. Daggers, knives, and small hatchets are examples of utility weapons. They are extremely short and light, normally with utilitarian application, and are ubiquitous and can be carried almost everywhere. In the above illustration, the Utility weapons are the daggers worn on the belt. Personal weapons are what we would today call a sidearm, analogous to the modern handgun. They are longer and heavier than utility weapons, but not so heavy that they cannot comfortably be carried on one's person while allowing free use of both hands. This category includes all swords with 100cm blade or shorter, and maces, axes, and hammers not intended primarily for use in two hands. In the above illustration, the personal weapons are the swords. Field weapons are the primary battlefield weapon of a typical medieval soldier, on foot or mounted. They

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[3] Fig. 1 *Codex Wallerstein, Wikitenauer,*
http://wiktenauer.com/wiki/Codex_Wallerstein_(Cod.I.6.4%C2%BA.2)#/media/File:Cod.I.6.4%C2%BA.2_088v.
jpg

possess serious military utility, such as the capacity to defeat heavy armor or mounted opponents and are not infrequently used in formation with others. They are long and heavy and cannot normally be comfortably carried on the body without the use of your hands. As such, they are carried only when combat is expected or when clear superiority is required, such as battlefield action or standing city watch. Field weapons include Spears, Pikes, Lances, and polearms of any type. It also includes handheld missile weapons: Bows, Crossbows, and Firearms. In the above illustration, the Field weapon are the short lances.

The Empire in the 15th century

The Holy Roman Empire of the 15th century was a troubled region. At the onset of the 15th century it stretched from Verdun, Burgundy, and Flanders in the west, to Hungary and Poland in the east. It extended south to include Florence, Genoa, and Milan. Its northern coast stretched from Holland to Pomerania. Despite its vast breadth, the Empire of the time had been experiencing a progressive weakening of its central political power, becoming less an Empire in the style of its namesake, the idolized Roman Empire, and more a collection of independent sovereign regions with limited de facto relationships to the Imperial Authority. This was not unintentional, but instead a characteristic of the attitude held by the residents of the Empire about the relationship centralized authority has to the society at large. The autonomy of the noble class in the governance and authority of their territories free from a strong guiding hand of central power was not considered a subversion of Imperial authority, but instead a process by which the Emperor was free to pursue lofty political and Imperial ideals while the noble class handled local responsibility[4]. In a sense, this delegation supported Imperial authority in that it created an idea that the Princes and Governors could be

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[4] Wilson, *Heart of Europe,* 366.

trusted to be loyal to the ideas of the Empire and did not need a strong guiding hand to keep them on the right track, without undermining the status of the Emperor as sovereign.

The elective body of the Empire was the *Reichstag,* or Imperial Diet, a deliberative assembly made up of the representatives of the many Imperial Estates, the constituent parts of the Empire which enjoyed the right of Imperial Immediacy, meaning that they had no authority above them save the Emperor himself. This assembly was where representatives of Imperial Estates would gather to deliberate on matters of law. In 1356, Emperor Charles IV passed the "Golden Bull" decree, an early constitution which recorded the litigious procedure of the Imperial diet in writing.[5] Most significant of the decree's many dictums was the significant increase in power for the Electors of the Empire, making them fully sovereign within their own estates by making them the final legal authority. The Seven Electors were to be the King of Bohemia, the Duke of Saxony, the Margrave of Brandenburg, the Count Palatine of the Rhine, and the Archbishops of Mainz, Koln, and Trier[6]. Despite increasing the size and prosperity of the Empire,[7] this decree weakened the authority of the Emperor, and the numerous semi-independent estates that arose as a result competed for prosperity and land, creating disorder and conflict between its many liberated constituent regions. This erosion of Imperial power would continue nearly unabated until the dissolution of the Empire in 1806, but in the short-term Charles's sons, Wenceslaus and Sigismund, had reigns marked by disorder resulting from the decentralization of the authority in the lands. Following Sigismund's death in 1437, the Hapsburg dynasty held the Imperial crown. From 1438 to 1439, the Empire was ruled by Albrecht II, and from 1440 to 1493, by Frederick III.[8] From 1493 until 1519, the last Emperor of the 15th century was Maximilian I.

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[5] Avalon Project, *Golden Bull*

[6] Reinhardt, *Germany: 2000 years,*165.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Reinhardt, *Germany, 2000 years,* 166.

By the end of the 15ᵗʰ century, the decentralization of the Holy Roman Empire had made it a politically weak and chaotic institution, although its individual component estates could be quite powerful. The authority of the Emperor could do little to control the incredibly numerous independent vassals: Barons, Knights, Abbots, and Bishops, as well as the Free Imperial Cities which had wrested independence from the nobility and were represented in the Diet. Accordingly, the ambitions of these independent territories sowed political chaos stemming from the conflicts of power, succession, and territory between these Estates. On the other hand, the amount of trade and by extension wealth grew during this time, and among the growing Burgher class, education, arts, and sciences flourished. The decentralized nature of the Empire had shown its shortcomings in failing to create unified political power in the sense of the modern state, but had nevertheless created an environment where trade, culture, and education were permitted to develop, and communities and societies were largely free to adapt and develop with a great deal of independence.

The Free Imperial City

This erosion of Imperial authority and rising chaos which the crown was increasingly unable to control, combined with a swelling of trade and commerce, had given rise to the Urban commune, as the relative independence of the city rose out of their newfound economic prosperity and independence. Cities, as centers of trade, were highly numerous in the Empire. Cities exerted power over their surroundings through their economic dominance, which lead in most cases to direct political control or authority, in a manner not entirely dissimilar to a Lord's authority in a feudal system. Many cities became so powerful they achieved practical independence from the ordinary confines of a feudal system, earning their freedom from the authority of a noble lord or ecclesiastical authority and creating their own system of government by council and laws based around communal organization. Cities that managed themselves in this fashion were

known as "Free Imperial Cities," which answered to no authority besides the Emperor and were entitled to representation in the Imperial Diet. The largest of these cities in Germany included Augsburg, Nuremberg, and Cologne, while politically equivalent pseudo city-states existed also in Switzerland and Italy, including Bern, Florence, and Genoa[9]. However, not all cities were Imperial and not all cities were free. "Territorial Cities" were cities which still lay under the authority of a lay or ecclesiastical lord, but nevertheless by virtue of their size and economic momentum still were great foci of power in their local regions and economies. The cities became the residences of what would become the middle class in early modern Europe, known in the Empire as Burghers. Burghers were the driving force behind a new urban culture, which represented a divergence from traditional feudal laws, considered by some to be a sign of how the influence of the Knights and the Nobility was in decline. The importance of birth and the ideas of class-based, pyramidal organization were rejected in favor of finding value in individual will and freedom[10]. They also began to extend their influence, in various ways, over the surrounding countryside. This was normally done with the acquisition of rural property by Burghers.[11]

There is no easy way to categorize the power and nature of the cities of the Empire during this time, as their level of autonomy, level of influence, wealth, culture, and importance created distinctions of character which did not permit the existence of easily transposed definitions which can be easily applied to all. Each city had laws and modes of political behavior unique to them based on their culture and circumstance. Nuremberg exercised literal power and influence over its surroundings in the fashion of the Swiss, while Augsburg and Cologne simply exerted economic supremacy.[12] These economic relationships

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[9] Scott, *Town, Country and regions in Reformation Germany.*

[10] Reinhardt, *Germany: 2000 years Volume 1,* 181.

[11] Scott, *Town, Country and Regions in Reformation Germany,* 288.

[12] Ibid, 225

eventually took the form of alliances for the purpose of protection and access to markets, and cities often

extended citizen privileges to minor nobles and convents.[13] The extension of Citizen rights to the dwellers of

the countryside is known in English as "Outburghership," and was one of the ways in which the feudal system

of serfdom began to accede to more "modern" notions of citizen merit and liberty, and until it was outlawed

in the Golden Bull, peasants who received Outburgher privileges, referred to in the Golden Bull as

Pfalburgers,[14] (False Burghers) were released from their obligation to their lord in favor of the city.

Outburghership also provided the city with markets and capital, becoming a form of economic protection and

influence, while also extending the area within which the city was able to police its roads and surroundings.

The process of a city's territorial expansion usually began with the acquisition of property by private citizens,

and over time the relationship would grow stronger and more dependent, allowing cities to form a zone of

economic and political control of their own, either in the form of Outburgher privileges or, in the case of the

later 15th century, alliances of service and protection[15]. These countryside zones of production became very

developed as the city Burghers invested to improve their returns, creating great sources of food and raw

materials to feed the city's industry and trade,[16] while alliances with minor nobles and military holdings

provided the city with strategic strongholds and foci of peacekeeping. In essence, outburghership was a

method of evading the legal impossibility of a city acquiring true territorial authority,[17] although the specific

benefit the cities sought from their territories were various, including the production of vital foods, prestige,

revenue, and trade.[18] Some cities, such as Ulm, acquired territory specifically for the purpose of bringing

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[13] Ibid, 233

[14] Avalon Project, *Golden Bull*

[15] Scott, Town, country, and region in Reformation Germany, 233.

[16] Ibid, 230

[17] Ibid, 234

[18] Ibid, 242

highways and trade routes under their direct control, to safeguard the long distance trade which formed the core of their revenue.[19] The motivation for the Burghers to acquire these properties was in many cases personal, rather than political, and many Burghers did not consider themselves politically ambitious. The influence they exerted over the local economies was primarily a method of creating personal agency for themselves[20] rather than inviting the obligations that came with civic and political power.

Life within the city

Burghers

> "At a time when, in theory and to a large extent in practice, every man had his lord, the Burghers called no man master. If they owed allegiance to the king or to the lord on whose land the city had grown up, it was a citizen's allegiance, not a personal homage"[21]

The rising power of the Free cities and the urban commune was driven by the urban middle class, the Burghers, who were in the process of developing a new culture which could be considered a conscious rejection of the Feudal order. The nature of the city's economic relationship with its surrounding centers of production and the Burgher's direct role in the purchase and management of estates lead them to prize entrepreneurship and personal wealth and authority. As such, in the Burgher culture the circumstances of birth were not considered a foundation of civil organization. The power and influence of the Urban Commune was driven by the personal entrepreneurial spirit of its Burgher inhabitants, which was individually

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[19] Ibid, 243

[20] Wilson, *Heart of Europe,* 512.

[21] Ferguson *Europe in Transition 1300-1520*, 47

self- interested in nature. The notion of Burghers as a class is necessarily communal, as the codes of civic obligation and privilege they created were a consequence of the political autonomy the urban communes of the Middle Ages possessed. Communities of Burghers had in some places displaced the nobility as economically powerful overlords of the centers of trade and production, and despite their rejection of older Feudal order, they began to dress and act in imitation of the nobility, according to the perception of their rising status. This provoked a backlash from nobles and writers of the time, and laws were passed to control the Burgher's encroachment on noble privilege, including laws designed to limit the ostentatiousness of dress according to class.[22]

Industry and trade being a core of Burgher identity, Burghers associated with each other in guilds according to profession, and membership in a Guild conferred benefits and rights without which making one's living in the city would be significantly more difficult, if not impossible, as well as social status and professional connections. Membership of the Burgher class was conditional, involving the ownership of property and wealth, involvement in a trade and its affiliated guild, and participation in the local culture of arms and fulfillment of obligations to the town and community, and if any of these conditions were not met, is was possible to lose your privileges accordingly. It was also necessary to swear and regularly renew oaths of allegiance to your community so long as you resided there.[23] Burgher culture was highly and locally patriotic, and punishment for disruption of the community could be quite severe. Burghers considered the function of a strong community to be their protection from the nobility, as the more prosperous and less chaotic their city was, the easier it was for them to maintain their independence. This social order was achieved through a system or rights and obligations which defined the lives of the citizens.

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[22] Reinhardt, *Germany: 2000 years volume 1*

[23] Tlusty, *The Martial Ethic in Early Modern Germany,* 12.

Rights

> "They were not a Military class, but they had the free man's right and the free man's ability to defend themselves and their rights by force of arms. They were, indeed, the first commoners to infringe the nobles' monopoly of the art of war."[24]

Those who lived in the Urban Commune lived under a system of rights, privileges, and obligation which governed their behavior and role within the community. These rights were always conditional on the fulfillment of obligations to the city, such as paying your taxes and participating in keeping the peace and membership in the guild of your profession. The subject of this paper, the right to bear arms, is a good illustration of the overall function of rights at this time, since it was considered a privilege, but carried with it certain obligations, as well as being strictly controlled along lines of class, gender, and religion.

Though it would become a mark of social class, the origin of the right to bear arms is strictly practical. This independence of the city politically and economically made it necessary for it to see to its own peacekeeping and defense, and since the standing army was not yet developed in Europe, defense of cities and other communities depended very heavily on the local population for militia service. The safety of the community and the lives of the citizens were at stake. On both an individual and civic level, the ability and willingness to engage in combat and warfare became an enduring symbol of self-sufficiency and independence[25], hallmarks of the Burgher culture of individualism. Refusal or inability of an individual to participate in these systems of civic defense was a failure to fulfill one's civic duty, which was especially egregious when the stake was the lives of one's neighbors, and so for the fighting classes (which practically consisted of all men of fighting age) cultivating martial virtue and ability was a social necessity. The military

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[24] Ferguson, *Europe in Transition 1300-1520* 47

[25] Tlusty, *The Martial Ethic in Early Modern Germany*.

ability of the citizen militia never reached the level of the professional soldiers of various kinds who arose at this time, and arguably never successfully developed into a tactically decisive military unit. However, the Militias of Europe occupied a significant role as the appointed defenders of fortified settlements, around which Medieval warfare revolved. More of this will be made in a later section.

In the Holy Roman Empire, holdovers from written Saxon law codes such as the Sachsenspiegel, promulgated in Latin but translated into German, and Swabian law codes such as the Schwabenspiegel cemented certain rights concerning self-defense and the bearing of arms. Citizens of Free Cities and other communes had the right of arms included in their rights as citizens of the town, and this right and privilege was written very tightly into the privileges and obligations of the Burgher class. The Right to bear arms at this time was, at least on paper, primarily a political structure for the common defense rather than a service to personal ego and bravado. Every male householder was obligated to own a weapon suitable for use in the field and faced financial and social consequences if he did not. For example, B. Ann Tlusty writes at the beginning of her book, *The Martial Ethic in Early Modern Germany* that in certain places, one needed to present sufficient arms in order to qualify for marriage.[26] Those who could not afford to arm themselves would be barred from city drinking establishments until such time as they could afford appropriate arms. These social restrictions were quite severe in their impairment of one's ability to partake in the traditions of social order, bans on marriage and entry into drinking establishments almost making normal life nearly impossible for those who would not or could not arm themselves. All these laws were in service of the Germanic system of Militia and common defense, where in theory the encouragement of armed, Martial Culture would translate the militant virtues of discipline and cohesion into the lives of the citizenry. In practice, the success of this system is debatable, at least from a military point of view. In the words of B. Ann Tlusty:

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[26] Tlusty, *The Martial Ethic in Early Modern Germany,* 1

"It is for this reason that the early modern experiment with civic defense in Germany, as elsewhere, has normally been viewed as ineffective. At best, civilian militias functioned as support troops or temporary defenders of fixed positions; at worst, they served no military function at all. But such a conclusion assumes that only the military perspective is relevant. For better or for worse, the militia system in Germany successfully strengthened ties of gender, neighborhood, confession, and local patriotism; underscored individual and civic autonomy; and slowed the consolidation of absolute power."[27]

From this it might be said that the cultural implications of this system were more profound that the military implications, and the effect it had on paradigms of power and wealth might be even more significant, not that these three categories can even be properly separated when they are entwined so closely. The militia system also served as a check against tyranny by slowing the process of monopolizing the use of force by centralized powers, ensuring that that the population was never entirely vulnerable to being oppressed by force of arms. Having a somewhat effective system of citizen militias also meant that the city was not dependent on outsiders for its defense, accordingly freeing it from any obligations that it might need to meet in return for protection, such as tithes or bribes. It also allowed a Town to police its own roads and trade routes from banditry and predation, and to prevent the forcible application of unfair tolls upon conduits of trade.

Despite its strongly practical origins, the Martial Culture that developed around the Militia tended to bleed into everyday life even in times of relative peace. With martial expression becoming so important to masculine identity, it was inevitable that from time to time, members of the community would come into conflict with each other. The sword was not considered a weapon suitable for use in the field by itself,[28]

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[27] Ibid, 9

[28] Ibid

though as a sidearm it found a place in the streets of the city as a weapon of social and interpersonal violence.

Although an ancient and ubiquitous weapon by this time, the sword had long possessed a cultural association with the nobility, and by the 15th century the aspirations of the Burgher class had taken this noble flair and adopted it for themselves. By the 15th century the sword became a symbol of status for commoners as well as soldiers and noblemen. Bearing a sidearm as dangerous a sword was essentially an adoption of willingness to confront peril, communicating the wearer's willingness and ability to engage in a combat to defend himself or his honor, as well as his participation in the Martial Culture. It was a symbol of agency in that regard, suggesting that this person, his honor, and belongings, were protected by his willingness and implied ability to use one of the deadliest weapons at the time devised. It was a form of leverage; where the unarmed were powerless to reject those who would control them, the armed citizen could always stand up for himself, or at least was not so powerless as to have had that right taken away. Given that the right to bear a sword was conditional, and breaches of good behavior or unchecked aggression could see it revoked, the bearing of a sword communicated that the individual met the conditions for that right and had not done anything that would cause him to lose it, suggesting virtue and self-control. Frivolous and dangerous displays, such as unnecessarily drawing a sword in a public place, were punishable by law and could result in disarmament, implying that the culture of arms was legally and socially bound by a sense of responsibility. It was a tool to be carried, its probable necessity accepted as reality, but it was not something one was free to deploy and use on a whim. It was treated with a degree of gravity, relegated to be used only when necessary, but always available. Even when in its sheath, however, it represented a visual sign of virtue and status.

Tlusty's construction of the Martial Culture of the time indicates a natural habitat for weapons away from the battlefield, where the martial virtues became a core part of the identity of the citizen, and the right to bear them was a major indicator of one's social standing based on the legal consequences (or lack thereof) of the behavior of the citizen. Ownership of weapons was seen as a symbol of economic success, and the

ability to use them was a major indictor of virility and agency. It was also a major indicator of social

manhood:

> "For Early modern men, the culture of arms grew directly out of the male realms associated with householding, sovereignty, autonomy, and the right to resist (*Widerstndsrecht.*) Owning, wearing, and using weapons implied mature manhood as well as personal sovereignty and financial solvency. The early modern images in which a sword or dagger represented the phallus then, were playing on much more than merely the shape of the blade."[29]

There is also a major gender politics component of the right of arms during this time, and the ways in which

the right of arms tied into both literal and social manhood, as well as how it related to womanhood, were a

major social component. Women were not considered militarily capable, a trait they shared with the Clergy

and sometimes Jews,[30] and as such they were exempt from both the privilege and the obligation to bear

arms. However, they were not totally disarmed in either the social and literal sense. There do not appear to

be many laws of the 15th century which explicitly forbid the woman from bearing arms, but aside from very

high-ranking, exceptional women, and based on the way armed women are portrayed, it was considered

highly unusual for a woman to arm herself with masculine weapons like the sword or gun, and fight as a man

would, even in defense of a city.[31] Given the ordered nature of this society, where your identity determines

your role in society, it seems likely that the idea that women should not bear arms was self-evident, as it was

not considered a part of the social role of a woman to involve themselves in violence.

Accounting for this evidence, it seems a reasonable hypothesis that the Armed Martial Culture of the

15th Century Holy Roman Empire was nearly ubiquitous to the men of the cities of the Empire. Their

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[29] Ibid, 6

[30] Ibid

[31] Ibid

participation in the Martial Culture connected them to ideas of military virtue and obligation to the

community, but also threw a distinctly martial light onto matters of personal conflict and honor. It also seems

to have formed a central pillar of communal and personal identity, which had a very significant influence on

the behavior and values of the citizens. The relationship of the citizens to their rights is very strongly

connected to their identity, given that there were very few, if any, universal rights, and any rights they had

were considered conditional on one's class, gender, and religion. Combined with the intense and

independent local patriotism enacted by the Burghers as they fought to remain free from the nobility,

matters of performative identity became tied to the very survival of the community. In short: you got your

rights and obligations from your manhood; your rights and obligations helped keep the community alive, and

therefore your adherence to your manhood was an indicator of your adherence to your obligation to the

community.

Martial Virtue

Even as far back as the 1st century writings of Tacitus, a Roman Senator and historian, all extant

versions of which were only rediscovered in the 15th century,[32] there is a strong cultural importance assigned

to the right to bear arms in Germanic society. In Tacitus' writings on Germania, he says:

"They transact no public or private business without being armed. it is not, however, usual for
anyone to wear arms till the state has recognized his power to use them. Then in the presence of the council

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[32] Robinson, *The Germania of Tacitus*

one of the chiefs, or the young man's father, or some kinsman, equips him with a shield and a spear. These arms are what the "toga" is with us, the first honour with which youth is invested. Up to this time he is regarded as a member of a household, after-wards as a member of the commonwealth.[33]"

At the time Tacitus wrote *Germania*, the contrast between his Roman society and the society he observed among the Germans was a central theme of his work. Rome had a national standing army, and as such the idea that bearing arms could be a universal "civilian" activity would have been unusual, although the idea of virtue associated with martial prowess and military service would not have been unfamiliar. Europe of the 15th century, Germany and Italy in particular, had more in common with the "Barbarian" system of bearing arms than it did with the Roman system. Niccolò Machiavelli, one of the most famous social writers from around that time, is very specific on the advantages of having a martial population and a native loyal army, as well as writing on the relative merits of being armed vs. being disarmed. Machiavelli writes his text based on his own personal experience and knowledge, which he considered to be a valuable resource, and he confidently believed that the virtues he advocates in *The Prince* represent very strong, if not ideal, social structure based strongly in pragmatism and utility. The right to bear arms not only had military applicability, but also the bearing of arms instilled a vigorous, masculine virtue which was healthy for a community or a society. In Machiavelli's words: "Apart from the other evils is brings with it, being defenseless makes you contemptible… between a man with arms and a man without them there is no proportion at all."[34] And he goes on to speak about how no mutually beneficial or socially functional relationship can exist between leaders and subordinates if armament is especially uneven or constrained, in that an armed society will not follow the will of a disarmed authority, and a disarmed population is vulnerable to abuse.

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[33] Sourcebook

[34] Machiavelli, Adams, *The Prince,* 42.

Possibly chief among "Martial Virtues" is Courage. The virtue of Courage was inexorably linked to feats of arms, and could not truly be possessed by anyone who was not steadfast and brave in the face of danger to oneself.[35] According to Philippe Contamine in *War in the Middle Ages,* "Courage was conceived above all as an aristocratic, noble form of behavior, linked to race, blood, and lineage, and as an individual trait arising from ambition and desire for temporal goods, honour, glory, and posthumous renown."[36] Courage was considered a cardinal virtue and was written of extensively for the entirety of the Middle Ages. Those who possessed courage at arms possessed a form of nobility, while those who were cowards were held in contempt. For example, soldiers who fled in the face of battle or deserted their regiment, if caught, could expect to be put to death, or to be publicly shamed and humiliated after their sword was ritually broken.[37] With such a close association between the military defense of the community, the right of free men to bear arms, and the significance of performative masculine virtue, the importance of militant courage and willingness to defend oneself by force of arms to the Burghers of the Empire must not be underestimated.[38]

The characteristics of a good soldier and the nature of courage are described by the Milanese Mercenary Pietro Monte in his 1480's text, *Exercitiorum Atque Artis Militaris Collectanea.* At the beginning of his chapter "Concerning the parts appropriate for a man, so that he may properly be called a courageous or excellent soldier…"[39] He writes "I hope that I shall deal with how a man shall be called courageous, vigorous, or perfect in arms." His analysis of this question is rather sophisticated, taking care to define what he means

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[35] Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages,* 253

[36] Ibid, 253

[37] Tlusty, *The Martial Ethic in Early Modern Germany,* 92.

[38] Ibid, 95

[39] Monte, Pendergast, *Exercitiorum Atque Artis Militaris Collectanea.*

by "vigorous," and "Perfect." Of particular interest is the question of whether one needs to be able to understand "with all arms in the way of harming enemies" or "if a man can be truly called vigorous if he can oppose his adversaries only with one weapon or in one way." As far as skill in fighting war, Monte has this to say:

"It is often said that this one is a valiant man with a sword in his hand, this one is strong on foot, the other on horseback. This person is good in skirmishing and another in combat on the battlefield, a certain one in besieging strongholds and another in defending them; or when someone finds himself in wide fields, one is good with one weapon and another with another. But this quality is not enough to support sufficiency in every chance in which anyone who pursues warfare happens frequently to find himself in, especially when going through alien or unknown lands. It is not hidden from him who has some practice that it often happens that one is assaulted in or outside the war, sometimes by manifest enemies, sometimes though, by brigands, and that we find ourselves with weapons, and other times without weapons, sometimes with just a dagger, and sometimes with a sword, sometimes with a lance, and sometimes with a poleaxe or partisan, and so…"[40]
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Monte goes on at length on the martial virtues of soldiering. A Man must be brave and temperate, he must be "light" and know how to climb and "rise from the ground with speed", he must be temperate and not given to excesses of gluttony or lust, he must know how to swim, and possess sound judgement and have his valor tempered by discretion. Monte's definition of courage seems to be largely consistent with his

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[40] Ibid

[41] Note Monte's hierarchy of weapons, from dagger, to sword, to polearms. Utility, Personal, and Field weapons.

contemporaries' definitions, in that Courage and Martial Virtue depend on mastering fear and confronting

danger "with a single mind," and includes self-control from gluttony and lust as not to lose control of one's

faculties to desire, as well as possessing good people skills and honesty, and other social virtues.

This notion of temperance, self-control, and virtue being tied to an exercise of arms is a strong

characteristic of the Martial Culture of the Empire. Its presence means that on some level, the presence and

maintenance of this virtuous culture among the society and population depended on there being widespread

adoption of militant tradition. In cities, this took the form of compulsory militia service as a condition for

citizenship, organized into units based on neighborhood or craft.[42] Do not be misled into thinking that this

Martial Culture was invented or cultivated in a vacuum. The Martial Culture has a very strong practical

foundation, based on the necessity for civic and personal defense. Aside from being virtuous, martial ability

and courage was an existential necessity, required to maintain the livelihoods of the citizens in a dangerous

world. The idea of martial virtue as a controlling factor of violence is not necessarily by design, but the

connection to civic defense means that the fundamental reason for the existence of the Martial Culture has

more to do with saving lives than taking them. The Martial Culture cannot be separated from its practical,

defensive roots, but that does not mean that the ethics and virtues attached to it are any less fundamental to

its existence and function.

Military and War in the 15th century

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[42] Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages* 83

In the 15th century, the individual's connection to the local structure of power had a distinct and universal Military component.[43] Bernard and David Bachrach in *Warfare in Medieval Europe* writes: "Wealthy and poor, aristocrats, free men, semi-free agricultural laborers, and even slaves, Christians and often Jews as well, were bound up by custom and law to participate in the Military organization of medieval Europe.[44]"

The culture of liberty and communalism that had been developing up to and during the 15th century in the Empire, as well as its equivalents in other parts of Europe was seen as fundamentally militarized. As previously discussed, the Urban Commune and the Burghers were often at odds with the nobility, and saw their continued liberty as being dependent on the community's ability to defend itself by force of arms to avoid subjugation. Some free cities owed their liberty explicitly to a violent rebellion or other feats of arms. The Free City of Strasbourg, for example, won its status following the Burghers, victory over the army of Bishop Walter of Geroldseck at the Battle of Hausbergen in 1262.[45]

A system where the population has not only no Military obligation, but no expectation that they will ever be called upon to serve, would have been very unfamiliar to the population of 15th century Europe, including the Empire. This Is a strong component of the prevalence of the right to bear arms in the Empire, as well as participation in local militias and defense. The martial virtues of honor which form the basis for the rights and obligations of arms must then be understood in their relationship to the Military traditions they are in service to.

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[43] Bachrach and Bachrach, *Warfare in Medieval Europe*.

[44]Ibid, 148

[45] Ibid

One cannot entirely understand civilian traditions of arms without some consideration of the military paradigms of the time, given that the right to bear arms was tied to military service. The 15th century was a time in which warfare was a part of life at every level of society.[46] Accordingly, the Art of War was thoroughly developed and considered, with full use of what a modern military expert might identify as "combined arms" warfare, involving many different types of units, with different complementary strengths and weaknesses. They were deployed and maneuvered in formation, with strong use of strategy and tactics both offensively and defensively.[47] Broadly, armies of the time consisted chiefly of the following categories of soldier: Men at Arms, Light Cavalry, Infantry, Missile troops, and Artillery, as well as the auxiliary support and logistical personnel. Men at Arms were heavily armored and armed Cavalry, who were always professional soldiers but not always Knights, whose relevance on the battlefields of Europe had only just begun to decline. Light Cavalry were lightly equipped men on fast horses, used as scouts, messengers, raiders, and skirmishers. Infantry were simply foot soldiers armed with Field Weapons, who in the 15th century formed the most numerous department of the average army. Missile troops could be mounted, but often were not, and carried a projectile weapon of some kind: Bows, Crossbows, or Firearms. Artillery in the 15th century enjoyed a greatly increased importance and consisted of heavy weapons used to breach fortifications.

In 1422, Emperor Sigismund of Luxemburg raised two armies to fight in the Hussite Wars in Bohemia. The second of these armies was assigned the objective of lifting the Siege of Karlstein and was composed of 1,970 men-at-arms and 34,700 foot soldiers.[48] Of those foot soldiers, it is not clear how many carried missile weapons and how many carried melee weapons, but what is clear is that, in the Empire at least, Foot soldiers had overwhelming numerical superiority over Cavalry. In the later years of the 15th century, Swiss Pikemen

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[46] Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*

[47] Bachrach and Bachrach, *Warfare in Medieval Europe* 148

[48] Ibid, 148

and German Landsknecht, both more formalized versions of the mercenary companies which had occupied

an important role in warfare for some time, became a dominating force on the battlefield. By the end of the

century, Infantry had become more qualified and better equipped than it had been in previous centuries.[49]

Soldiers and recruitment

Philippe Contamine in *War in the Middle Ages* recognizes three distinct types of military service

common in the late Middle Ages: Those obliged by Feudal service, levies of national militia, and volunteers.[50]

In the 15th century the use of Mercenaries, which could be considered volunteers in the above classification,

enjoyed a new prominence.[51] Though the Militia was a central pillar of the Military organization of a region,

ultimately successful combat depended upon professional and competent soldiers. The notion that the

Nobility formed the core of medieval military organizations is erroneous, and for all places and times within

Medieval Europe, non- aristocratic professional soldiers were always much more common than their noble

counterparts, and many nobles preferred to pay fines rather than go on campaign.[52]

Militia

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[49] Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages,* 137.

[50] Ibid, 151

[51] Bachrach and Bachrach, Warfare in Medieval Europe 142

[52] Ibid, 148

According to Bernard and David Bachrach in *Warfare in medieval Europe,* Medieval warfare on any kind of large scale was centered around either the attack or defense of fortified structures, such as castles and cities. Warfare surrounded around the control of territory and resources by force of arms, and a fortified position under enemy control stymies the mobility of the armed forces executing their mission. This outlook gives the role of the Militia new relevance[53] as they, in obedience to their martial obligation, became the native defenders of fortified economic and industrial areas. Fortifications allowed a small number of combatants, already occupying a tactically or strategically significant location, to hold out against a much larger force with the advantage of strong walls and high vantage points. While professional soldiers were the most significant component of an offensive or mobile war, they were expensive. Militia trained under the traditions of martial obligation and civic defense remained the most cost-effective way of defending the economic centers which wars were primarily fought to control, both because of their relative inexpensiveness and because they were highly motivated to defend their homes and communities. However, they were not looked upon favorably by the aristocracy.[54] They were comparatively inexperienced, and their effectiveness on the open battlefield was inconsistent, but they were more than capable of defending a stronghold.[55] City ordinances also ensured that the militia armed themselves with the most current weapons available, declaring personal weapons to be insufficient to fulfill the obligation to bear arms,[56] and in most cases Field weapons such as pikes, Halberds, Crossbows, and Firearms were required.

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[53] Ibid, 89

[54] Ibid

[55] Ibid

[56] Tlusty, *The Martial Ethic in Early Modern Germany.*

Weapons and Material

Swords and Blades

      The Medieval tools of war and self-defense took many forms, each formed according to its intended function. Probably the most culturally significant, if not most numerous, weapon of the 15th century Empire was the Sword. The shape and character of the sword is among the most various of any weapon of the 15th century, showing a distinct set of types and evolutions, with differences ranging from exceedingly subtle to distinct and explicit, with equally various effects on the object's handling and presence. Very generally, an archetypical sword of the European Middle Ages and very early Renaissance would have a double-edged blade which tapered in one form or another to a sharp point, useful for both cuts and thrusts. The blade might also have a concave channel running down the central axis of the blade, called a "fuller" which reduces mass and increased durability, in the same manner as a steel I beam used in construction. From the bottom of the blade ran the tang, a narrow protrusion of metal which formed the core of the hilt of the sword, which included a two-pronged crossguard whose axis would be perpendicular to the axis of the blade, affixed to the sword both by heated hammering and by pressure exerted on it by the grip, which was normally of wood wrapped in something like leather. The grip was kept in place by the pommel, a relatively large metal piece which formed the "top" (medieval writings always refer to the pommel of the sword as the top and the point as the bottom, as if it were hanging point down on the belt) of the hilt and by some fashion was fixed to the end of the tang, the pressure of which kept the whole hilt assembly together.
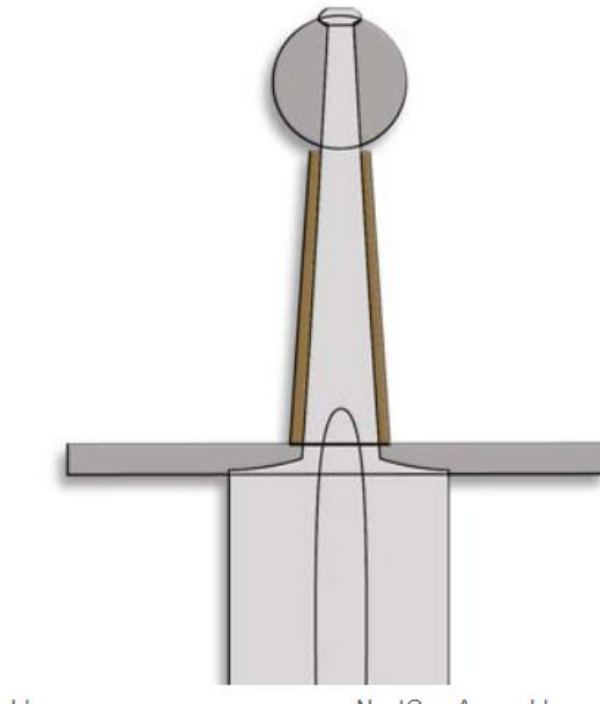
Figure 2 A diagram of sword construction, from Albion.[57]

The basic forms the sword took were widely varied and difficult to generalize under one umbrella term. They varied in size, with many swords requiring or encouraging the use of two hands. Pietro Monte writes explicitly on the virtues of long-handled swords, saying: "it is good to have long handle on a sword or dagger. For even if the sword is short, if the battle lasts for a while we should take it with both hands,[58]" The art of using a sword in this two handed fashion with both hands on the grip was referred to in fencing manuals as "Langes Schwert[59]" or the Long Sword, referring to the weapon's reach when swung when wielded in such a way as opposed to Short Sword, which referred to using the sword with one hand on the

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[57] Albion Swords, *Fully Functional: Contsruction. https://albion-swords.com/swords-functional.htm*

[58] Monte, Pendergast, *Exercitiorum Atque Artis Militaris Collectanea ,*LIV

[59] Wikitenauer, *Nuremberg Hausbuch*

blade, in the manner of a spear, and was used in armored combat where cuts and hews would be all but totally ineffective, apparent from their total lack of inclusion in the armored fencing manuals. In modern language, the term Longsword refers to the weapon designed to be used in this way rather than to the method of use itself, meaning a relatively long bladed sword with a grip designed to accommodate two hands. The Long Sword was perhaps represented disproportionately in the fencing manuals compared to its actual popularity, more popular were smaller, lighter one-handed swords. both kinds of sword were simply referred to as "sword" in the 15th century, although specific technical language existed (but was not consistent.) This functions in much the same way that a Pistol, Rifle, and Shotgun, are all referred to casually as "gun" in the modern day.

A 20th century collector of swords, Ewart Oakeshott categorized the Medieval sword into many types, based on form, period, and geography. It is nevertheless important to remember that Oakeshott's typology refers only to two-edged, cruciform swords and does not include single edged curved swords, which would have also been present in the 15th century and especially popular in the eastern parts of the Empire. Therefore, towards the end of the 15th century and into the 16th Oakeshott's typology does not adequately represent the rise of Sideswords and Rapiers and does not represent the extent of personal weapons of all types in any time period it covers.
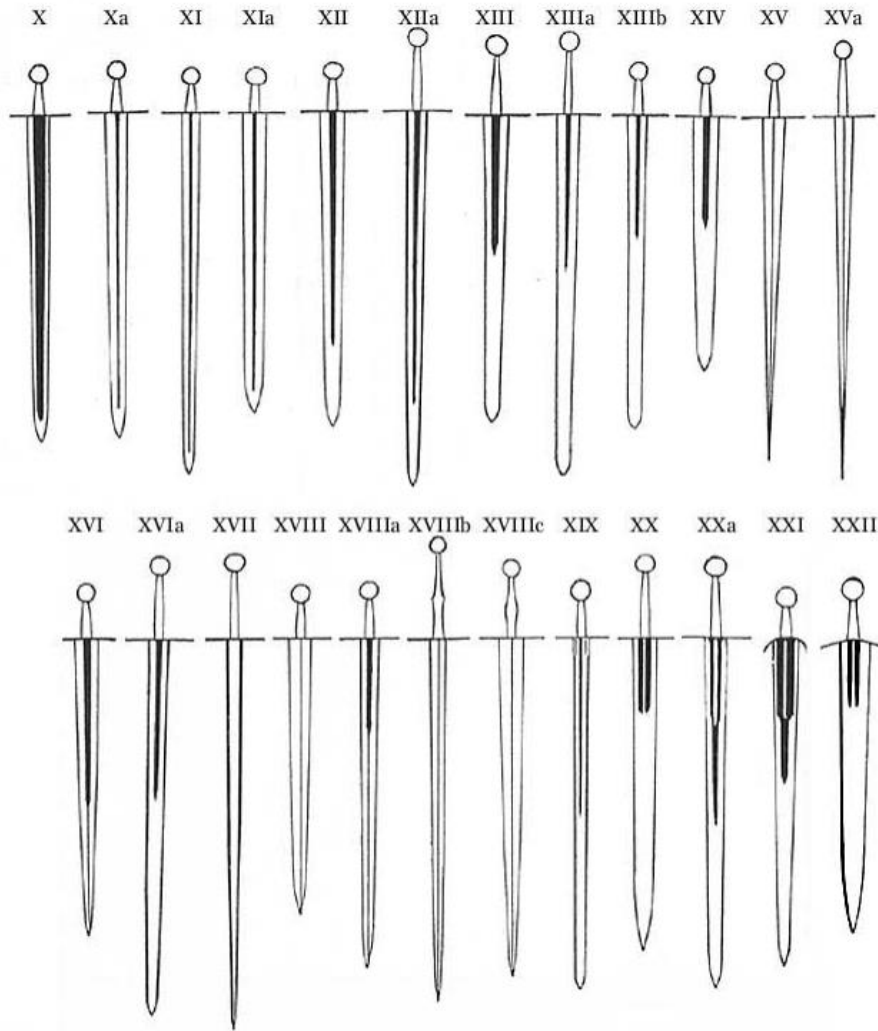
Figure 3. Oakeshott's Typology.[60]

The above illustration of Oakeshott's typology gives some idea of the many variations on the sword which were in use, and even this typology only covers one of several families of sword. For each type,

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[60] Fig. 3, Ewart Oakeshott, "Sword in The Age of Chivalry", 1964

Oakeshott explains the characteristics which set the type apart from the others. One of the sword types which would have been in use during the 15th century, the type XV and its longer subtype, the XVa, is described thus:

> "During the second quarter of the fifteenth century swords seem to have reverted to the dual function of cut and thrust. Type of blade which appears early in this century gives an admirable all-purpose sword, much lighter than the massive late fourteenth-century thrusting swords (about 2 ½ to 3 lbs. as against 4 to 5 lbs.) with very sharp points but sufficient breadth at the center of percussion, and a flat enough section, to provide perfect cutting edges."[61]

Figure 4 a reproduction XV sword by Albion[62]

Figure 5. A reproduction type XVa Longsword by Albion[63]

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[61] Oakeshott, *Archaeology of Weapons,* 303.

[62]Fig. 4 Albion Swords, *The Poitiers, https://albion-swords.com/swords/albion/nextgen/sword-medieval-poitiers-xv.htm*

[63] Fig. 5 Albion Swords, *The Mercenary, https://www.albion-swords.com/swords/albion/nextgen/sword-medieval-mercenary-xva.htm*

The typology highlights a telling characteristic of the swords of the Middle Ages, that they had a variety of forms, but those forms were consistent enough to be organized relatively neatly into types. These types represent trends in the desirable characteristics of a sword at the time the type was widespread. The XV and XVa for example, are the first in the typology to have a gradual taper over the whole length of the blade, like a long triangle, and lack a fuller. The effect this gradual taper has on the characteristics of the sword, as opposed to parallel or near-parallel edges with a wider tip are quite significant. The wider blade base changes the mass distribution of the weapon, drawing the "Point of Balance" closer to the handle. The Point of Balance is the part of the weapon where it would balance when placed on your finger, or the point at which the mass distribution of the sword evens out. The closer the Point of Balance is to the hand, the easier it is to manipulate the weapon, due to reduced leverage. As a practical experiment, hold a hammer first by the handle, and then by the head. Note the difference in the ease at which the end of the tool can be accelerated when the center of mass is closer to your hand. However, you will also notice that the amount of striking power you can generate holding the hammer is upside down is greatly reduced, in the hammer example making it quite difficult to drive a nail with the light end. Swords are subject to the same trade-off. A closer Point of Balance therefore, robs power from the blow or cut, but makes it easier to control the point. Refer again to Figure 1, and note four types: the XV and XVa, already discussed, and the XII and XIIIa. The XV and XII are both one-handed types, but the XV has a triangular taper and the XII has parallel or near parallel edges and a wide tip. The same comparison exists between the XVa and the XIIIa.

Figure 6 Type XII sword by Albion[64]

Figure 7 Type XIIIa by Albion[65]

These types were chosen because they represent relatively extreme examples of type difference for the purpose of comparison. The XII and XIIIa are contemporary to the XV and XVa, all of them becoming popular around the 13th century, although the XV types are thought to have developed towards the end of the century. On the other hand, the earlier type in the Typology, the type X, was popular as early as the 9th

[64] Fig. 6 Albion swords, The Knight, https://albion-swords.com/swords/albion/nextgen/sword-medieval-knight-xii.htm

[65] Fig. 7 Albion Swords, The Steward, https://albion-swords.com/swords/albion/nextgen/sword-medieval-steward-xiiia3.htm

century.[66] The average points of balance (measured in inches from the base of the blade) of all the swords of these types produced by Albion are in the following chart.

Type XV Average CoB	3.43"
Type XII Average CoB	4.37"
Type XVa Average CoB	3.78"
Type XIIIa Average CoB	4.9"
Type X Average CoB	4.9

The difference among the onehanded swords is .94", and the difference among longswords is 1.12". The type XIIIa and XII are much more like a type X, the difference in that case being 0 for the XIIIa and .53 for the XII. The line of evolution between these two sword types sees a significant shortening of the point of balance, without accounting for other factors such as length and weight, it seems that during the 15th century the users of the sword began to favor control of the point over cutting power in some cases, reflected by the shorter CoB and narrower points which do not appear as distinctly in earlier types. In the case of the XV, its fine point and stiff spine suggests it is expected to be able to overcome the highly sophisticated personal armor of the 15th century. However, the market for swords with more traditional characteristics did not disappear. The cutting focused blade never lost its relevance in this period, since not all combat was armored. Some swords were even developed to be better cutters by the 15th century, such as type XVIIIc. This may be because the sword's inherent unsuitability for armored combat when compared to other

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[66] Albion Swords, *Oakeshott's Typology of the Medieval Sword, a Summary. https://albion-swords.com/articles/oakeshott-typology.htm*

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weapons like the mace and poleaxe[67] prompted carriers to disregard designs which overcome armor entirely, being unwilling to give up the advantages against unarmored opponents possessed by swords with stronger potential for cutting. Despite this, the wide tip seen on earlier swords was almost universally replaced by narrow, pointy tips. This precise engineering and thoughtful design are not the result of aesthetic or artistic impulse, but rather of the demands of use and the necessity for effectiveness and efficiency. Even the ostentatious swords of wealthy nobles and Burghers still rarely sacrificed efficacy for showiness if the weapon was ever intended to be used.

The process of forging a sword is intensive in both labor and resources. Historically, swords have been especially expensive weapons firstly because steel makes up a very high proportion of its mass, whereas many other common weapons contain significant wooden components, like the haft of polearms. In the case of a sword, the steel needs to be tempered and formed in a specific way to make it strong and flexible. This meant that for most of European history, swords were extremely expensive weapons. By the 15th century, however, advances in metallurgy and economics had brought the cost of the sword down to a more affordable level. They remained a relatively high-class tool, and as such were far from universal among the people of the Empire.

Among less wealthy persons, who were unlikely to enter combat against armored opponents, we see the use of a weapon referred to as a "Messer," a single-edged blade more like the modern Machete than to the long sword, both cheap to acquire and easy to carry. The Messer is a stout weapon, with a relatively blunt point and a single cutting edge, lacking the long sword's precise and piercing control of the tip, but making up

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[67] Oakeshott, *Archaeology of Weapons* ,303

for it in its cutting potential and convenience of construction and wear, being much more convenient to carry

on one's person than a Longsword would be. The characteristics that set the Messer apart are its relatively

short, single- edged blade, straight cross guard with a *nagel*, a protrusion perpendicular to the cross guard to

protect the hand, and its knifelike grip. Unlike a more traditional sword, Messer grips have a wide flat tang

with wood riveted to the sides, much like a modern knife. The pommel of the Messer is in some ways shaped

like the head of a hawk, rather than being round and symmetrical.

Figure 8. A reproduction Messer by Albion. Note the visible rivets on the side of the grip.[68]

The longsword declined in popularity over the course of the 16th century and was partially replaced

by a weapon we today identify as the Rapier. A long, slender thrusting sword with a complex hilt designed for

use in one hand. The Rapier favors the thrust over the cut, which made it the object of disapproval from

some who considered it unmanly or militarily ineffective at the time of its introduction, but it and weapons

like it eventually became a very popular choice of weapon for the Medieval townsman. The preference for

the Rapier is an interesting case, because it is different in many important respects from the cutting swords

which had up until that point been the dominant type in Europe. Unlike the Longsword or its siblings, the

Rapier was a weapon which was almost never seen on the battlefield, instead being relegated to civilian

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[68] Albion Swords, *The Soldat, https://www.albion-swords.com/swords/albion/nextgen/sword-grossemesser-soldat.htm*

operation. In 1599 an English gentleman by the name of George Silver wrote a scathing repudiation of the Rapier and its masters, in which he wrote:

"But that which is most shameful, they teach men to butcher one another here at home in peace, wherewith they cannot hurt their enemies abroad in war(2). For, you honor well knows, that when the battle is joined, there is no room for them to draw their bird-spits, and when they have them, what can they do with them? Can they pierce his corslet with the point? Can they unlace his helmet, unbuckle his armor, hew asunder their pikes with a Stocata, a Reversa, a Dritta, a Stramason or other such tempestuous terms? No, these toys are fit for children, not for men, for straggling boys of the camp, to murder poultry, not for men of honor to try the battle with their foes."

The Rapier's unfavorable cutting characteristics and extreme length seems to have made it an unpopular choice for those facing the press of battle but seemed ideally suited for one-on-one combat between peers similarly armed. In this way, it is a prime example of how the nature of a social contract can shape the form of a weapon, showing what characteristics people were and were not willing to give up when they considered what kind of weapon they would like, but this should not necessarily be interpreted as a sacrifice of effectiveness. Instead, the forms of these weapons and how they fell in and out of favor over time are indicators of shifting cultures and expectations. What about the culture of combat had changed to make the rapier a more favorable choice than the wide-bladed medieval cutting sword as described by Oakeshott?

The Sword is considered a Sidearm, meaning that on the battlefield, the sword was normally carried in a secondary role in favor of a weapon of more significant military utility, such as a Polearm or projectile weapon. As mentioned previously, a professional soldier of the 15th century would enter battle with his polearm, Bow, Crossbow, or Gun first, with the sword used only in circumstances of close quarters combat or in the event his main weapon is lost or broken. The sword's relatively light weight and convenient size made it easy to carry on one's person, easy to access at all times, while leaving the hands free. Off the battlefield,

these same characteristics made the sword a convenient weapon for daily carry and self-defense, leading to its popularity among the Burgher class. By the 15th century, the sword had already been a symbolic object for centuries, and as such the Burghers also adopted the Sword's noble heritage for themselves.

Polearms and Heavy weapons

The Spear had been chief among the primary weapons of the foot soldier of Medieval Europe since well before Roman times[69] and is the ancestor of weapons like the Pike. The Polearm family of weapons was broad and diverse, branching off from the single pointed spear to include many different types of long, wooden-hafted weapons, and by the 15th century these weapons were as well refined and engineered of any weapon of the day. Polearms could either be long, more than 8 feet, or short, at about the height of the user. Since the 13th century[70] Foot soldiers predominantly carried polearms which had a cutting component and a thrusting component. The cutting component often looked like an axe or the blade of a wide cleaver, and the thrusting component resembled a spear point or narrow spike. The Halberd and Poleaxe, for example, resemble an axe head and spike on a haft, relatively short in the case of a Poleaxe and long in the case of a halberd. The long Pike was also used by Infantry for warding off cavalry.

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[69] Bachrach and Bachrach, *Warfare in medieval Europe.*

[70]Ibid, 227

Figure 9 A 1475 poleaxe. From the Wallace collection.[71]

The Pole weapon in its many incarnations was the primary field weapon of melee infantry in the 15th century, and even Knights and men at arms commonly used the Poleaxe when dismounted or in duels, as shown in some fencing manuals concerned with dueling[72].

Bows, Crossbows, and Firearms.

The role of projectile weapons in medieval warfare is quite profound. Bows, Crossbows, and Firearms were an indispensable arm of any medieval army, providing firepower at range that was sometimes effective even against heavily armored opponents. In the 15th century, projectile weapons were almost always Field weapons, and could themselves generally be divided into three types: Bows, Crossbows, and Firearms.[73] Like other Field weapons, these were only used in certain serious cases of combat and were

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[71] Wallace Collection, *Poll- Axe*
http://wallacelive.wallacecollection.org/eMuseumPlus?service=direct/1/ResultLightboxView/result.t1.collecti on_lightbox.$TspTitleImageLink.link&sp=10&sp=Scollection&sp=SfieldValue&sp=0&sp=1&sp=2&sp=Slightbox _3x4&sp=0&sp=Sdetail&sp=0&sp=F&sp=T&sp=11

[72] Wikitenauer, Paulus Kal

[73] Bachrach and Bachrach, *Warfare in Medieval Europe,* 230, 232, 240

usually illegal to carry in the streets or on one's person.[74] Despite their more controlled nature, shooting

societies were still common and popular within cities, as projectile weapons were very relevant to the

defense of strongholds and require relatively little training to operate. Marksmanship was more relevant to

ideas of martial sport and competition than personal conflict and dueling, but nevertheless represent a facet

of armed Martial Culture among Burghers[75] and in some places, shooting societies outstripped fencing

schools in popularity by a very wide margin.[76]

Weapons in Art

Despite being in some ways constrained by the necessities of function, the sword's aesthetic role as

a fashionable or artistic object is extremely significant, and due to their prevalence and effectiveness, the

subtle shapes the various parts of the sword take became artistic symbols in their own right, growing

associated with ideals which accompany martial and manly virtue and become represented by period

artwork with a great deal of care being taken to represent the weapons in a way which is meaningful to the

viewer. The presence of a weapon in a piece of art is a many faceted thing, especially among a population so

familiar with them. Subtle differences in shape and decoration might not mean much to the untrained eye,

but to a familiar viewer might convey details of wealth, class, or power. The artistic obedience to the

functional and performative form and appearance of the weapon is another sign that the men who lived with

these tools were deeply familiar with the meaning behind their engineering, and even when drawing,

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[74] Tlusty, *The Martial Ethic in Early Modern Germany*

[75] Ibid

[76] Ibid

painting, or sculpting the weapon, they remained conscious of these elements which made the weapon what it was.

Figure 10 A Large Kermis Festival. From Tlusty, *The Martial Ethic in Early Modern Germany*

A good example of this is the woodcut of the Large Kermis festival by Sebald Beham, which was made in 1535. The Kermis festival is a rural festival which would have been attended by peasants, and so the class of the individuals depicted can be confidently understood. On the right of the image there is a fight depicted between two groups of men wielding visibly curved swords, drawn in such detail that the shape of the pommel of the sword is visible under the hand. Both the blade and the pommel are characteristic of the Messer. Many of the other participants of the Kermis festival are wearing swords, many of which are very similar to Messers and in at least two cases, the rivets holding the grip together are visible. Swords worn by other characters in the scene have more traditional sword grips with pommels and handles visibly wrapped in

strips of something rather than being of exposed wood, often possessing complex hilts like those of a
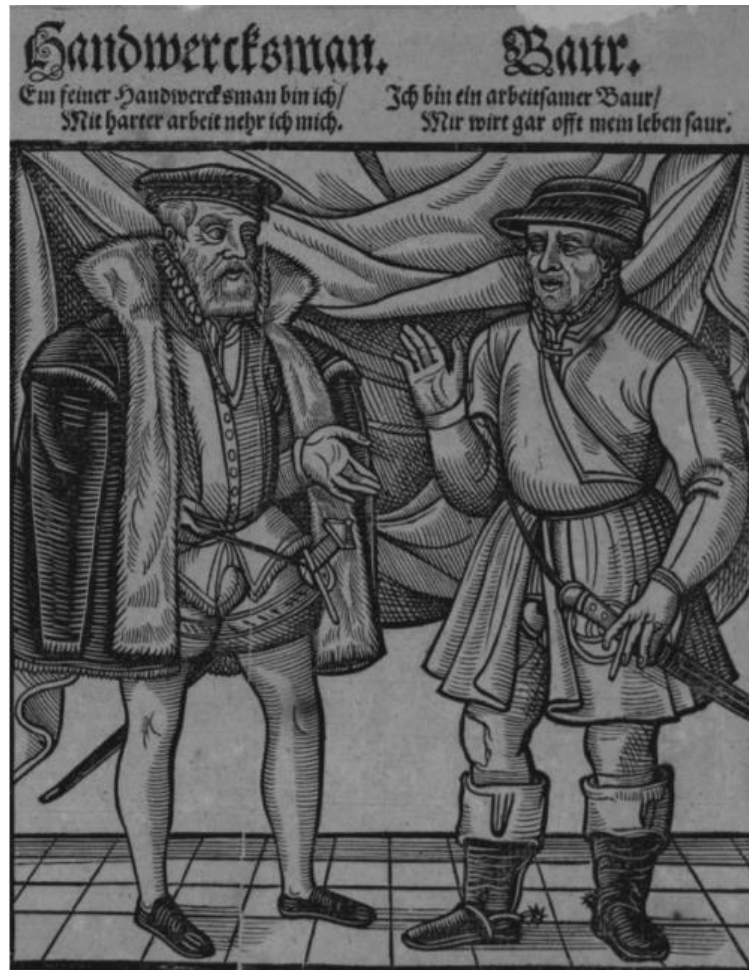
Sidesword or early Rapier.

Figure 11 Craftsman and Peasant. From Tlusty, *Martial Ethic in Early Modern Germany*

Another woodcut, this one apparently much later, from 1600, depicts a craftsman and a peasant

standing side by side, contrasting their apparel. Both characters have swords on their belts. The craftsman

possesses a sword with a ring on the right side of the crossguard, with a wrapped and pommeled grip, while

the peasant carried a Messer with a complex handguard and visible rivets on the grip. This distinction is

interesting because, given that this illustration is a visible contrast of two social classes, that the detail of their weapons is considered an element worth including in the illustration. The class implications of the form of the weapon you carried seem to have been very well understood by the artists of the day.

Material History conclusion

Despite their significant cultural and artistic prominence, these weapons display a precision of form too built-for-purpose to be anything but highly sophisticated and developed tools, whose chosen function was always the centerpiece of its being. informing, rather than adhering to, norms of fashion and aesthetic. However, as time went on, separate families of swords began to develop for the battlefield and for wear. A Longsword of the 14th to 15th centuries struck a good balance between effectiveness as a weapon and ease of carry, contrasted against something like a polearm, which would be difficult to carry around. Missile weapons would be too unwieldy and impractical to be carried as well, as reliable and light Pistols wouldn't be developed for more than a century on any kind of appreciable scale. Put in the simplest possible terms, the sword was the most popular weapon for dueling and self-defense precisely because it was the best weapon for the job, and its popularity directly gave rise to its artistic and cultural significance. The battlefield was ruled by the Polearm, the projectile, and the armored horseman for the same reasons or practicality. Swords simply lacked the power of a polearm or the reach of a gun or bow, and so were relegated to the role of a sidearm. Even then, the swords on the battlefield were not always akin to the swords carried on the street by civilians. This divide between social and military combat had widened in the 15th century, and by the end of the century the overlap between the tools of War and the tools of Social combat would be less and less

extensive. In either case, though, the intentionality of the design is just as central. Whether for civilian or

military use, the weapon has always been a tool, designed specifically for its intended task.

Textual evidence

Post- plague Europe saw the rise of the middle class, and as such certain privileges to bear arms were

no longer limited to those of noble birth, and as such there is a written martial tradition that arises among

the Burghers and Citizens of towns. This relatively straightforward legal distinction seems to have given rise

to a significant cultural shift, which created a civilian habitat for armed violence with a reduced military

connection. This was an environment in which men like a fencing Master named Johannes Lichtenauer were

able to write and distribute the Fechtbuch (fight book) tradition which seems to have been an enduring

written authority on Arms in the lands of the Holy Roman Empire. In Paulus Kal's Fechtbuch, he lists the

masters of the Fellowship of Lichtenauer, which consists of 17 individuals,[77] who are thought to have been

active in cities such as Prague, Munich, Warsaw, Danzig, Nuremberg, and Innsbruck, among others.[78] Nothing

of the same extent is known to have existed anywhere else in Europe at this time. Thought to have its origins

in the mid to late 14th century, the Fechtbuch tradition of Masters such as Sigmund Ringeck and Hans

Talhoffer show a common influence in the Zedel of Johannes Lichtenauer, and these written and illustrated

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[77]Wikitenauer, Paulus Kal

[78] Liechtenauer, Johannes, ed. and trans. by Michael Chidester et al. *The Recital of the Chivalric Art of Fencing, with Commentary and Illustrations by Master Sigmund ain Ringeck, Master Peter von Danzig, Master Paulus Kal, and Other Inheritors of His Tradition.* Edited by Michael Chidester, with translations by Michael Chidester, Mike Rasmusson, David Rawlings, Thomas Stoeppler, Christian Henry Tobler, Christian Trosclair, and Cory Winslow. Based on transcriptions by Dierk Hagedorn. www.wiktenauer.com, 2010-2016.

sources paint for us a picture of what may represent the fighting arts of the citizens of the Empire. The prevailing interpretations of these fighting arts construct a martial system that shows a similar degree of sophistication of form as the weapons themselves. "The Kunst des Fechten," or Art of Fighting, as it is described in the gloss of the Zedel in Cod.44.A.8, the Codex Danzig, is probably not representative of the common styles of fighting which would've been in use at the time it was written, describing the use of the sword in two hands, referred to as the "Long Sword." The unknown author of Codex 44.A.8 glosses Lichtenauer's Recital in the preface as follows:

[1] Here begins the gloss and the interpretation of the Epitome on the Long Sword

This has been composed and created by Johannes Liechtenauer, the one High Master in the Art, may God be gracious to him, so that princes, lords, knights, and soldiers shall know and learn that which pertains to the Art. Therefore he has allowed the Epitome to be written with secret and suspicious words, so that not every man shall undertake and understand them. And he has done that so the Epitome's Art will little concern the reckless Fencing Masters, so that from those same Masters his Art is not openly presented, nor shall it become common. And the same secret and suspicious words of the Epitome which stand hereafter, the glosses teach and explain thus, so that everyone who otherwise can fence may well undertake and understand them.

Figure 12. the preface to the Danzig gloss, translated by Cory Winslow[79]

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[79] Wikitenauer, *Pseudo Peter Von Danzig, http://wiktenauer.com/wiki/Pseudo-Peter_von_Danzig*

The author explicitly states that Lichtenauer, the author of the original recital, took

significant effort to prevent the secrets of the recital from falling into the hands of "Reckless fencing

Masters," in order to prevent it from becoming well known by Masters who were not considered worthy by

the Author. This passage suggests a somewhat competitive and exclusive culture of Martial teaching and

lineage, which both Lichtenauer and the Author considered in their writings. The concept of the "Art" is used

in the Fechtbuch related to Lichtenauer, and the term denotes a right and proper way to fight which is

considered the epitome of martial skill, but at the same time does not refer to what may represent the

foundational skills of sword combat. A Duel in 1444, in which another member of the Lichtenauer tradition,

Hans Talhoffer, may have participated, arose over one master accusing the other of being False by knocking

the school's sword off the wall, where it was ceremonially hung. This was apparently a well-known practice

among the fencing schools of the Free Cities, although this particular duel was inconclusive.[80] The practice of

challenging the master of a school in this fashion casts light on the standards to which the fencing masters

held themselves and each other, related to the concept of an art of fighting and its semi-sacred nature. The

teaching of the art of fighting was taken very seriously, and it was considered the responsibility of the

practitioners to make sure that the art was not being mutated or misapplied, possibly for the sake of its

reputation but also perhaps as a competitive way to constantly test the efficacy of the art in application.

Being a teacher of swordsmanship in the imperial cities during this period was never a lucrative trade, even at

the height of its popularity. Travelling fencing masters were known to have gone to great lengths to advertise

themselves, in at least one case provoking a city to ask the local fencing masters to tone down the fiery

rhetoric of their notices.[81] Accordingly, there exists a possibility that the fighting art advertised by fencing

masters and schools needed to somehow augment itself for the purposes of advertisement, and if that is

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[80] Kleinau,

[81] Tlusty, *The Martial Ethic in Early Modern Germany,* 211

indeed the case then it is possible that the fighting arts recorded in the Master's books may have been made

excessively showy or complicated at the expense of effectiveness to increase their appeal. This does not

mean that the arts that were being taught in person suffered from this problem, however, but it does make

some aspects of the written art take on a new significance.

The Zedel has, for example, several underdeveloped areas which appear in more detail in later

fencing manuals. For example, it makes very little reference to timing and distance, which modern fencers

and even other martial artists and combat athletes like Boxers would agree to be fundamentally important.

Kunst des Fechten as a system does not seem to account for quick back steps or other mobility related

evasions whatsoever and assumes that the fencers are already in range when most of the plays they describe

begin. The texts make references to common mistakes or weaknesses of common fighters, which the art is in

many ways specifically designed to exploit, all of which seems to indicate that this Art is designed to

supplement existing skill rather than form a complete system. By contrast, the fencing described by English

writer and fencer George Silver in 1599 has a much more developed system of timing, and the relative merits

of many kinds of motions at speed involving the hands, feet, and body.

This all suggests that the Zedel is a set of advanced techniques, specifically intended not to become

"common." It also suggests that the intended audience is those who "Otherwise can fence." Neither of these

things suggest that this was written with the intention of being used to train inexperienced fencers, implying

that the author considered nearly the entire tradition of "Common fighting" to be already known by the

reader, and the fighting style described in the text is specifically designed to exploit weaknesses one is likely

to encounter against common fighters. There is also no indication that this martial system has anything to do

with warfare, as it always describes combat between two individuals and does not cover combat with or

against multiple people, formations, or the use of projectile weapons or considerations of terrain, although

more unorthodox plays are added by later glossers. All evidence indicates that the Kunst Des Fechtens was a Burgher fighting art concerned with Dueling, though perhaps also containing elements of knightly combat such as mounted and armored fighting, though the relationship it had with professional soldiers is not known.

According to most current interpretations, the theory of the Lichtenauer fighting system surrounds actions taken "Indes," translated into English usually as "meanwhile." This refers to a technique with multiple components which occur simultaneously, rather than a series of component motions. For example, "Abzetzen" is a thrust with both a forward and lateral movement, displacing an incoming strike and thrusting with the point of the sword at once, as opposed to a dedicated defense followed by a dedicated attack. Lichtenauer describes 5 "secret strikes" which are both a defensive and offensive action, depending on geometry and timing for their effectiveness. Each of the Secret Strikes corresponds to a guard against which it has mechanical advantage. The Art relies upon the fighter's ability to interpret feedback from the pressure communicated between two crossed swords, and accordingly take the safest and most efficient action in a single time. Along with the intentional design of the weapons of the day, a picture is beginning to emerge of an armed culture that developed highly sophisticated systems of combat. they were willing to explore the mechanical and physical truths of armed combat in sophisticated detail, although the difficulty fencing masters had in making their profession profitable and the lengths they went to advertise themselves also shows that sword fighting was not so central to society that advanced fencing lessons were in very high demand. With this in mind, it becomes important to remember that the Martial Culture did not focus on the sword and the duel in the streets, instead arising from ideas of civic defense. Swords and duels represent a relatively minor component of this culture.

The Burghers of the Holy Roman Empire were far from a military class with professional militant ambition or ability, and the duel of honor in the streets of Augsburg is a special kind of fight with a special kind of rules, making it not necessarily a universally applicable case study. In the words of Bachrach:

"Throughout the Medieval Millennium most foot soldier fought in the context of a Phalanx, whether they were on Offence or on Defense and whether the opponent was on horseback or on foot. This meant that the highly complex and intricate 'dance' of the duel that is illustrated in late medieval fencing manuals surviving in great numbers from Italy and Germany had little relevance to the battlefield experience of most medieval soldiers."[83]

Pietro Monte is specific as to the different tools of the battlefield, as opposed to the weapons of daily carry. As previously mentioned, the weapons of the battlefield were not equivocal to the weapons of the street, and the laws pertaining to mandatory bearing of arms were specific as to which weapons were suitable. As such, simply owning a sword would not satisfy most of those obligations, as it was not considered a decisive weapon on the battlefield. The sword remained a significant weapon, but always took a secondary role to a primary weapon of some kind. This contrast exists because Lichtenauer's Art, at least as it is described and marketed by his Glossers, is not a military art, but rather a Burgher art. Aside from the weapons included, Lichtenauer's art is always depicted as an art for single combat, or a fight with only one opponent, and the armament of the depicted participants is usually equal (although other authors like Talhoffer include asymmetrical weapon pairings.)

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[83] Bachrach and Bachrach, *Warfare in medieval Europe,* 315

[3] This is the preface:

		Das Ist die vor red
1	Young knight learn To have love for God, honor maidens,	[10r] 😕 |Junck ritter lere |Got lieb haben frawen |Jü ere
2	So waxes your honor. Practice Knighthood, and learn	|So wechst dein ere |vbe° ritterschafft vnd lere
3	Art that adorns you, And in wars brings honor.	|kunst die dich zÿret |vnd in kriegen |zu° eren hofieret
4	Wrestle well, grappler. Glaive, spear, sword, and knife,	|Ringe~s gu°t fesser glefen sper swert |vnd messer
5	Manfully handle, And in others' hands ruin.	|Mandleich bederbñ |vnd In anderñ henden verderben
6	Hew therein, and swift there. Rush in, hit or let drive.	|Haw drein |vnd hürtt dar |Rausch hin trif oder la faren
7	Knowing this Hastens the man seen praised.	|Das in die weysen |hassen die man sicht preÿsen
8	Thereon you grasp, All Art has length and measure.	|Dar auff dich fasse |Alle ku~st haben leng |vnd masse

Figure 13 Intro to the Danzig gloss. Translated by Cory Winslow[84]

The extensive reprints and glosses of Lichtenauer's fencing tradition suggest a degree of popularity,

and it influenced the Germanic schools of swordsmanship for a century or more to come, but its exact level

of popularity and effectiveness is not accurately represented purely by its textual extent. We know from the

text itself that the Kunst des Fechten was not initially the common style of combat in use by the Burgher

class, and the Fechtshule of the Empire, while the teachers sometime are known to have military experience,

are not themselves connected to the military in any known way at the times the glosses were written.

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[84] Wikitenauer, *Pseudo Peter Von Danzig, http://wiktenauer.com/wiki/Pseudo-Peter_von_Danzig*

Itinerant fencing masters are known to have advertised to townsmen rather than soldiers, sometimes to the chagrin of the town government itself.

Practical testing

"Also know and note that one cannot really talk about fencing in a meaningful manner or explain it with written words, as some might like. You can only show it and instruct it by hand. So use all your senses and pay close attention to the art and practice it more for fun and play. so it will be ready for you faster for fencing seriously. That is because practice is better than art, your practice may very well be useful without art, but your art is useless without practice."

-Nuremberg Hausbuch, MS 3227a

Even accepting that weapons and fighting arts are formed as is appropriate for their intended use, a simple examination of the objects and texts still leaves major gaps and areas of imperfect understanding. Fighting is a physical art, and best understood physically as well as intellectually, and a complete understanding must be known both in one's body and in one's mind. Given that the Germanic fighting styles and arts of combat are so extensively recorded, reconstruction has the potential to fill in the gaps. The author has for several years undertaken the study of the Lichtenauer tradition, alongside a community of enthusiasts who have been working their way through the puzzles of these arts since the early 1990s. I have supplemented my study of Kunst des Fechten In the time I have spent studying these fighting arts I have performed well in several tournaments and tested my skills and interpretation in full-contact sparring and in interpretive drilling.

According to this firsthand experience, flaws in the Lichtenauer tradition of sword fighting have arisen alongside its merits. As it is self-admissibly a collection of tricks or advanced techniques for the experienced practitioner, the "Zedel" is not representative of the common schools of swordsmanship at the time it was written, and is best understood as an embellishment of, rather than replacement for, fundamentals of sword combat. The secret strikes themselves are without exception avoidable by simply stepping back, a method of evasion also not described in the text. Certain "plays," or multi- step techniques, while making perfect sense when drilled, often require exactly perfect conditions and split-second timing to execute, and even then, may not be entirely safe. The conditions under which the plays might be appropriate are in some cases extremely uncommon, and as such, its application in combat would under the best of circumstances represent a very small fraction of all actions taken by the participant. This raises the question of why one would dedicate training time to techniques they're not very likely to perform, when they may in fact be better off with less advanced more reliable "Gemainfechten" (Common fighting) styles trained to a higher degree of proficiency. Nevertheless, the plays of Kunst Des Fechten are all highly effective in theory, and their execution requires a sophisticated understanding of leverage and timing. The detail with which these plays were designed cannot be denied, and though their execution in combat could be considered dangerous, or at least extremely difficult, it cannot be denied that they were written by experienced practitioners.

The effort to learn the Art as it is written in the text also underlines some confusing questions of layout. The layout of the original Zedel is not what modern martial arts instructors would consider a consistent pedagogy. Modern reconstructions have had a great deal of trouble with the organization of the glosses and treatises, leading to a great deal of confusion. A well-known modern instructor of Longsword, Mike Edelson, wrote an article, *The Strange Duality of Early Kunst des Fechten Glosses,* a thorough overview of the strange layout. Among the examples, actions taken from the "Four Guards" are taught before the Four

guards themselves are taught.[85] "Complex winding actions" are explained before the concept of winding

itself is explained.[86] Based on the confusing and illogically ordered pedagogy present in the glosses, it further

raises questions of how the text of the glosses relates to actual fighting and, by extension, the Martial Culture

of the Holy Roman Empire. Edelson's closing remark on the matter underlines just how poorly understood

the written tradition is:

"So what was KDF, really? We will probably never know. But I believe that it isn't quite what most of us think it is. As to what that means, I'm not entirely sure, but the one thing I'm increasingly certain of is there was a very specific context for KDF, and without knowing and understanding that context, we will never truly understand it."[87]

The practice of this written tradition has shown us that the relationship that the most widespread

written tradition on armed combat in the Holy Roman Empire has to the Martial Culture that governed

armed combat is in fact extremely tenuous. Aside from the question of what, if any, texts exist with a more

explicit connection outside of legal documents and requirements, we are forced to wonder what the role of

these treatises really was.

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[85] Edelson

[86] Ibid

[87] Ibid

Conclusion

The 15th century Holy Roman Empire's culture of bearing arms and its associated rights is very far reaching, with a significant relationship to the changes in politics and society. The right to bear arms is integral to the population's relationship to violence, especially in the case of men, and in this specific place and time it tells us much about the increase in collectivist and communal governance and the continuing rise of civic duty as a condition of personal liberty. The communal, semi-democratic culture of the cities was fundamentally militarized, where freedom had to be protected by force of arms both literally and socially, involving not only the execution of violence, but also cultivating an image of military self- sufficiency. As a result, the Empire saw a strengthening martial ethic among the middle class, and to a more limited extend even peasants. During this time, the civilian realm of violence- Social Violence- expanded, creating an environment and market for new weapons and fighting arts which sacrificed or lacked military utility and did not resemble the weapons and arts which dominated the battlefield. At the same time, the rise of professional soldiers began to create a divide between the execution of war as it related to what we today might call national politics, and the population at large. Nevertheless, there was a strong association among men between martial capability and masculine social standing, to the point where nobody was truly considered a Man in the social sense of the word if they were not willing or able to fulfill their military obligation or willing to fight in defense of their honor. Divorced from military utility, civilian dueling culture took on a persona of its own until by the 16th century it was arguably more prevalent than it had ever been.

The 15th century is also possibly the last century in Europe where there wasn't a widespread difference between civilian and military swords, typologically speaking. In later centuries, civilian demand for swords was satisfied by weapons which were criticized by writers such as George Silver as militarily ineffective, such as Rapiers, but the trend would nonetheless continue until it eventually led to the

smallswords of the 18th century, and the modern sport of fencing today. Up to the end of the 15th century the

swords carried by civilians would not be out of place as sidearms of the battlefield. This could be because as

civilian association with arms developed, it became worthwhile to own weapons which were better for the

street than the field, although the weapons required for the battlefield were far from forgotten by the men

who filled the ranks of European militias during the Renaissance.

Map, 1400 AD

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