



## The Art of Control (The Fechtschule Manifesto)

*And however the fencing with the sword is nothing other than an exercise, wherein a pair comes together in opposition to battle with the sword that one would overcome and defeat the other with caution and agility, artfully, gracefully and manly, applying the same in hews and other handworks. So that where in difficult, earnest matters one will through such exercise be quicker and more skilled and may have the foresight to protect his body.*

*These can namely be divided justifiably and well into three parts, namely the beginning, the middle and the end. Such three parts should and must be taken heed of in every Stuck (play), which you undertake to fence, that you namely know with what hew or from which stance to attack your opponent. So then as work your attack further to him in the middle with the handworks you are free to fly to openings and overtake him in the attack to preserve the Vor (before). Lastly how you properly and well withdraw, if not with harm to him, at least without injury from him.*

### **-Joachim Meyer 1570**

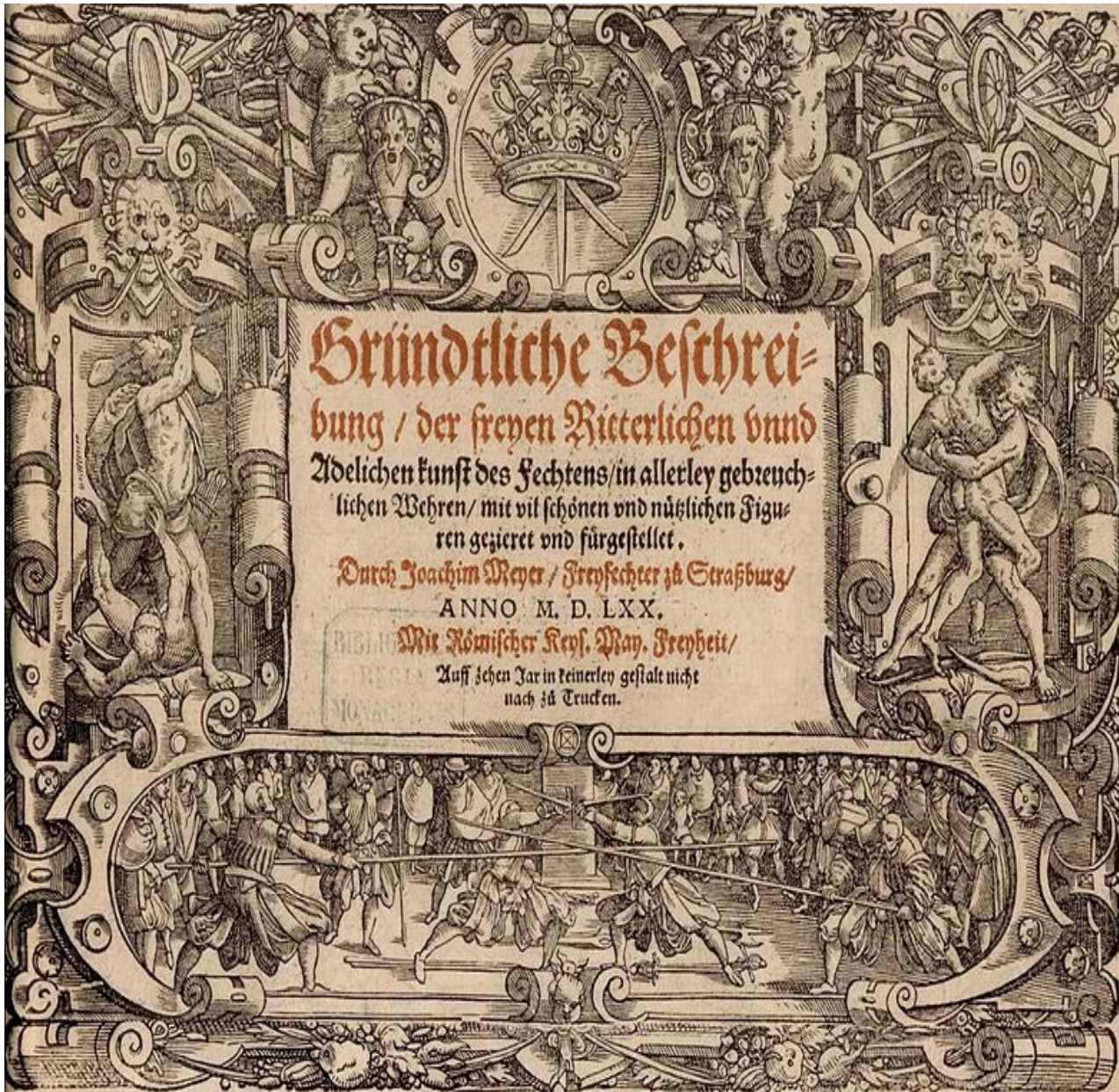
*Translated by Jayson May of the MFFG*

With these words, Joachim Meyer lays out the path to skill in wielding a sword in 16th century Strassburg, a free city bordering the Holy Roman Empire. Master Meyer signed his name as Freyfechter, led his school in Strassburg, and organized at least four Fechtschule events between 1561 to 1568. Strassburg was one of the greatest of the free cities and artists of many forms went there to test themselves and to earn a name and learn their craft. Included in these four Fechtschule events were petitions to the city council for the right to hold the event, and usually a public posting of the event as well as an open challenge to all local guild fencers and free fencers to test themselves (and the organizers). These events were rough and tumble, with bouts held wet or dry (to first blood or not) using Fechtschule swords (rebated steel) as well as wooden dussacks, staffs, halberds and pikes. They were a major source of entertainment of the time and stirred up much controversy as well with their violent activities. on folio 2r of Meyer's 1560 manuscript, we can see a depiction of what is presumably a Fechtschule event.



Meyer Freifechter Guild

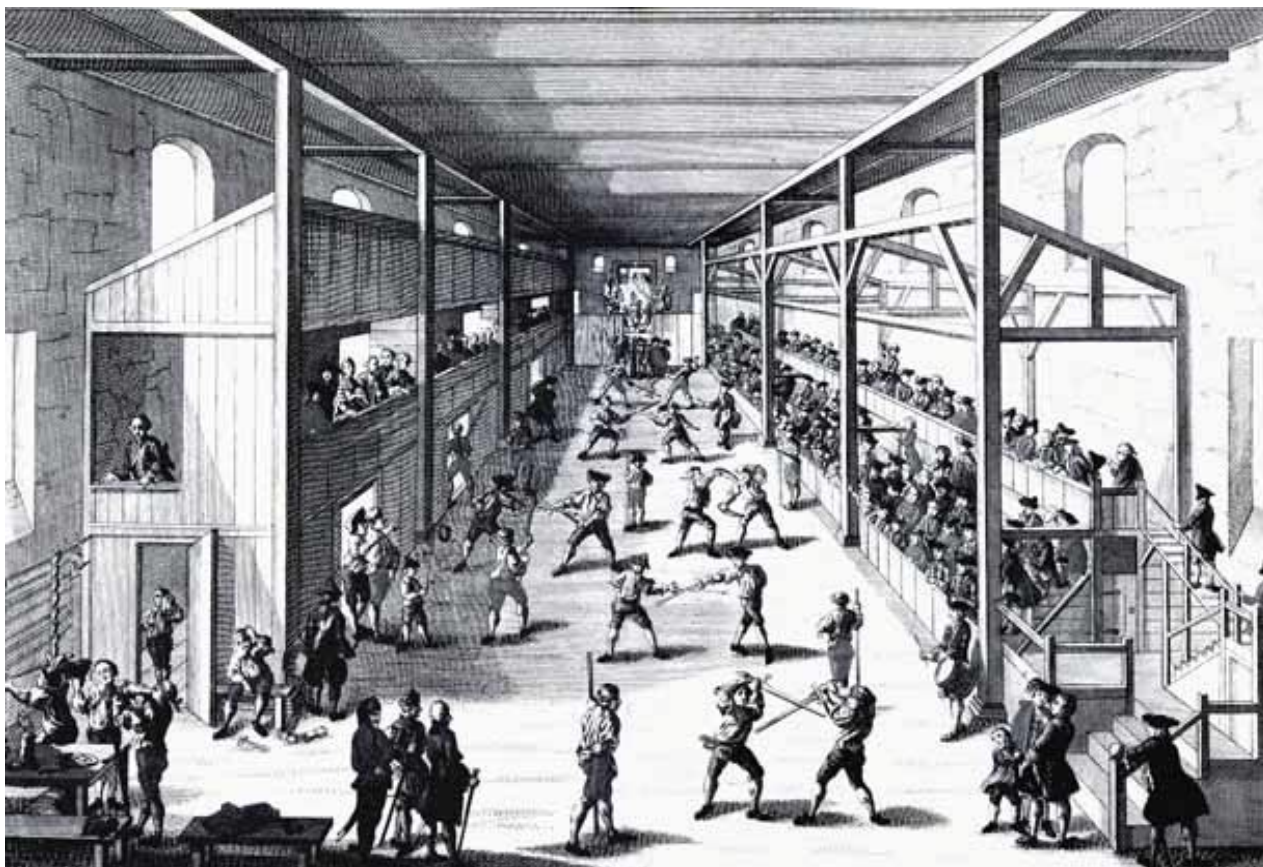
We see a similar depiction on the title page of Meyer's 1570 publication.



## How did they do it?

What do we make of this now, here in the 21st century as we attempt to reconstruct these arts? Most of us look at these events and the descriptions of them and shake our heads in wonder at the risks these men assumed, in their training halls and especially in the Fechtschule events—events which were by nature chaotic and dangerous with open challenges to all fighters in the city and the win being determined by first blood. But given their reality entering into the Protestant wars and (as Meyer himself remarks) the need for men to fight in the coming wars, these events were likely a repackaging of the knightly arts of war to prepare men for the battlefield needs of their nations and city states. But how did they do it? How did they avoid destroying each other's ability to work in crafts and trades and even war? How did they learn these arts so earnestly and yet so safely as to be able to actually use these skills in life-or-death situations? They don't seem to have used any padding or gloves until

much later, and they certainly show no padding, masks, helmets or gloves in any of the Fechtschule depictions until the 18th century. This can be dismissed as an intentional deception, but I would have to wonder why they would not show gloves or masks/helmets if they were used. We do see certain Fechtbücher like that of Paulus Hector Mair showing finely-wrought metallic gauntlets in certain plates—as well as many, many more without. Meyer’s material certainly shows no gloves whatsoever. Given the price to be paid for lazy training, I am inclined to think the preparation was intentionally tough and exposed fencers to danger so that later, when they actually needed it they were properly prepared. If they had gloves and did not use them, that tells us something about how they viewed danger and risk when attempting to prepare for even more dangerous pursuits like war, dueling, and personal defense.



*Fechtschule image from the collection of Chirstopher Amberger*

I believe the answer to that question is in Meyer’s quote at the beginning of this article, specifically this part:

*“And however the fencing with the sword is nothing other than an exercise, wherein a pair comes together in opposition to battle with the sword that one would overcome and defeat the other with caution and agility, artfully, gracefully and manly, applying the same in hews and other handworks. So that where in difficult, earnest matters one will through such exercise be quicker and more skilled and may have the foresight to protect his body.”*

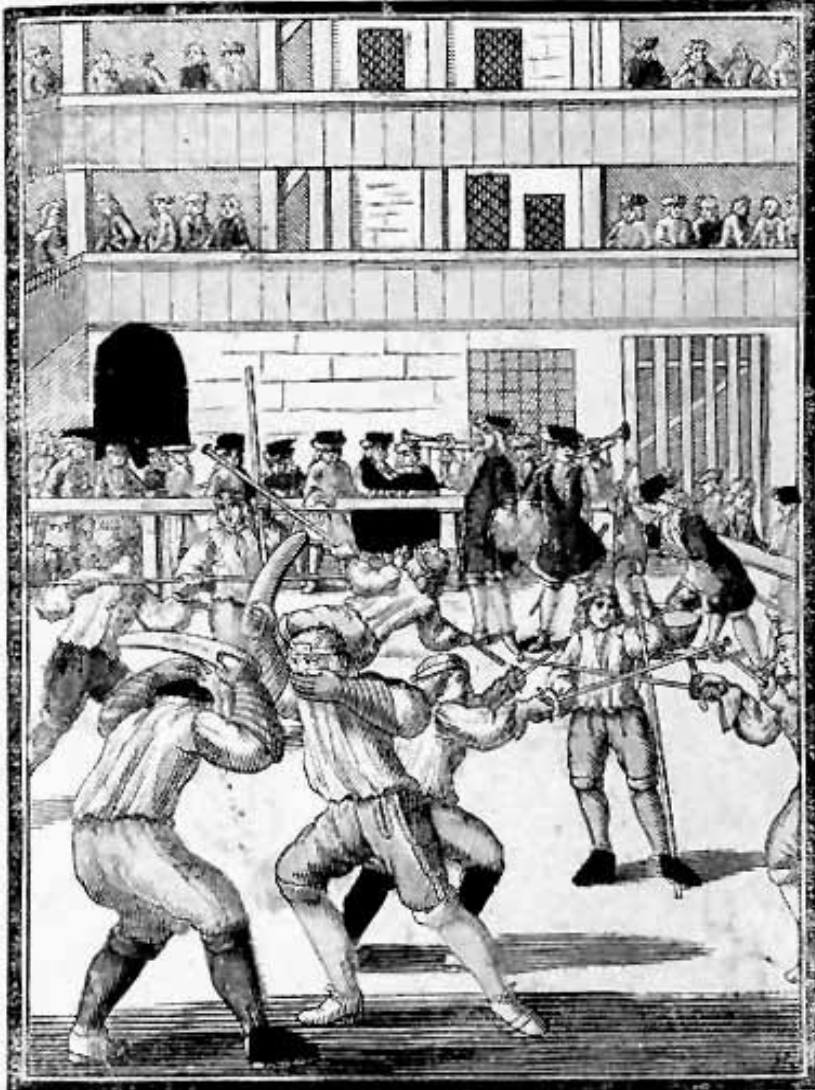
*Translated by Jayson May of the MFFG*

How do you swing a sword at your training partner in a martial way that actually feels like you might really be doing it, but which does not injure that training partner? After all, training partners are hard to come by in HEMA, so why waste them? What did Meyer know that we do not know today? Why did these fencers not develop padded fencing clothes—after all, they clearly had gloves and helmets which they could have worn. Why would they expose themselves to such danger? And why did they later begin to adopt more safety-conscious methods?

Let's start with why. Why did they risk their eyes and fingers and livelihoods?

I think the answer to that question is RISK. The significant risks they were sure to face warranted preparation of such significant measure as to give them comfort and skill when facing the endeavors they prepared for. In other words, training for war requires a much harsher preparation than we are usually willing to engage in, but we know that without it we are liable to pay a heavy price later. The Fechtschulen were used to develop and test skills that were critical on the battlefield of the day; in fact, at that time the Central European methods of war had come to the forefront of the European battlefield, and those same weapons were in vigorous use in the Fechtschule events of the day. Halberd and Pike formations ruled the battlefield, and the great sword was an important supporting weapon to the Central European method of warfare The Fechtschulen , and moreso the guilds and schools that supported them, prepared men for these hardships and helped form up militias. The skills learned in these dueling bouts developed the physical and mental attributes required to become skilled soldiers—this provided a good foundation that could then be transformed into battlefield skill with proper adjustments. Granted, halberd and pike in a dueling art are far different than battlefield use, but a person skilled in the dueling art could be transformed into a battlefield tool much more easily than an unskilled person.

Christoph Rösener a Marxbrüder Master of the Longsword wrote a long poem which we will excerpt here to show the extent of the fighting intent between these guilds.



*Federfechter and Marxbrüder in the Nürnberg Fechtthaus 1689.  
Germanischer Nationalmuseum.*

*“If the noble Lion swings his Curly Hair  
Observe the Griffin  
Who with his Proud courage and splendor  
condemns the Courted Marxbrüder all  
Then should you strike him down  
and tear out all his plumage  
that he must be carried away by his comrades  
That whom we will also strike on their”  
Translated by Kevin Maurer of the MFFG*

There are other poems telling of men having eyes gouged out with the staves, and of terrible injuries and even deaths at these events where, due to the prize monies and the prestige involved,

competitive emotions no doubt ran high.

As time went on and this need subsided, the methods of the Fechtschulen developed became safer, which reflected that lack of a need for high level training in these arts. As the real need diminished, so too did the need to push the training to the extent previously needed.



fechtschule held at Heilsbrunner Hofe in Nürnberg in 1623.

### So now let's talk about how?

How did they train this hard in an unprotected fashion and not ruin each other on a regular basis? We go again to Meyer's statement from the beginning of this article.

*"Now combat with the sword is in essence a practice in which two opponents strive against each other with the sword with the intent that one will outmaneuver and overcome the other with intelligence and nimbleness, artfully, finely, and manfully, with cuts and other handwork; so that if it were necessary in earnest cases, through such practice one may be more quick and skillful, and more judicious for the protection of his body."*

Notice how it doesn't say 'smack the living shit out of each other'? That is because anyone can hit hard with a longsword or halberd. The German art of war is all about that power and the weapons show this—every move, every guard projects power and uses the whole body to strike. But the German fencers also had less respect for the *Buffel-er*. We call them *Buffalos* today, but back then '*Buffel*' meant to whack, and so the '*Buffel-ers*' were the whackers. The *Zornhau* is also called 'the Peasant's strike', because anyone can strike without thought to his own safety or without any thought after that strike. But what does that mean? Striking without thought for one's own safety is seen as lower in the mind of fencers because it does not take advantage of the depth of the art. Just as offense is important, defense is just as much a part of fighting; without it, it's simply a race of speed and strength, whereas with the art, it's more like a chess match. Learning this art is much more than merely learning to hit hard and fast: the descriptions we find in the *Fechtbücher* show a great depth of technique, developed over many generations of fighting men.

If we see plates full of students doing free-play with steel and wooden weapons, should we not assume they actually did this (and presumably on a frequent basis)? And if they did, how did they avoid what we expect would have been an unimaginable cost in injury and accident? I see nothing to suggest they would be any less inclined to be taken out of work for months, or to lose their vision or fingers, than we are today. We must assume therefore that they knew something we do not. Perhaps they placed much more emphasis on the "artful" aspect of fencing than on athletic power and speed, or perhaps they just developed a much higher level of skill in handling these weapons than we possess today. Judging from the attention to detail and the development of the deceptive elements of fencing in Meyer's works, I feel comfortable saying that the ability to stop or redirect your weapon was just as important to him as being able to throw it out towards your opponent as fast as possible. The detail inherent in drilling and footwork, timing, distance, balance and all the other elements of fencing requires precision and control that can only be developed through countless hours of hard training.

### **Now let's examine a some of the things Meyer has to say in his work.**

Here is a list of Meyer's Longsword handworks (which also apply to Dussack):

First our translation by Jayson May of the MFFG

*binding, staying, feeling, slicing, striking around, running off, misleading, flying past, setting off, slinging, Pulling, Doubling, Reversing, Snapping Around, Failing, Circle peel, winding, winding through, changing, slice off, hand pressing, shifting, hanging, wrenching, barring, blocking, gripping over, running in*

Then the translation from the Jeff Forgeng Art of Combat translation:

*binding, remaining, chasing, slicing, striking around, running off, deceiving, flitting, setting off, parrying, pulling, doubling, reversing, snapping, failing, circling, looping, winding, winding through, changing, changing through, slicing off, pressing hands, sliding, hanging, wrenching, barring, blocking, gripping over, running in.*

What do most of these handworks have in common? They are not simply straight strikes at the opponent, but rather they involve many other methods of delivery of the attack or the defense. Meyer says quite specifically that *Zucken* (or "Pulling") is 'the beginning of all deception or misleading'. In fact if you look, most of what we would call the Art of Longsword or Dussack fencing does not rely on direct attacks at all, but on artful movements that draw the opponent out of his defense or overwhelm his defense in some way other than simply overpowering him. If you look at the weapons in the plates



of Meyer's manuals it is clear how they avoided blasting each other. And there were, of course, many other reasons not to do so. These guilds were social organizations, and offending or injuring other members was frowned upon and quite liable to elicit a violent response in reaction. Simply challenging someone's honor in 16th century Central Europe would inevitably result in some form of payment—usually of the violent kind.

Another of the poems of Christoph Rösener describes how students were taught among other things to

*behave modestly on the teaching ground, not to recklessly destroy any weapon  
And should not mock anyone else at all,  
In exercise, it is forbidden.  
And you should not beat anyone bloody  
who is just beginning to fence.*

This is a clear reference to respect, similar to the code of conduct expected of anyone at a modern martial arts studio, a breach of which is sure to get you a few helpings of a your own medicine at the hands of more advanced students (in sparring, if nothing else).

Here is the poem in its entirety from Ehren Tittel und Lobspruch by Rösener.

*When you would go to be taught  
Thus greet the Master and the Students  
And when you arrive at the school  
Show that no strangers came with you  
He can then be a good Schoolright  
With the Master three courses are going  
Soon you your fencing is accepted  
No Nest should you be attached to  
Also, wear no Dagger on your side  
and don't wear anything on the head  
Take no ones weapon from their hand  
Ask permission first of the Master  
Hold firmly the Weapon, never drop it  
Also dont fold yourself, be mindful of all  
Also with Violence batter no weapon  
With Honorable Manner conclude your work  
You should also throughout make fun of no one  
In the practice it is forbidden  
Also should you bloody no one  
The first to fight you must be.*

And here, later where he says:

*if you conduct yourself according to teaching*

*you will then have honor in fencing  
As I have just now finely reported to you  
throughout.  
You will also learn My Master's name  
So I will be known as an honorable Student  
I will make no displeasure to you all*

*Translated by Kevin Maurer of the MFFG*

Control is valuable in both offense and defense, and indeed, if we look at the classic depiction of the 'Buffel-er', "he who strikes without thought for his own safety", we find that the control necessary to strike and defend is exactly what is missing. Ignoring the realities of what happens after you try to hit someone with a weapon is "having no thought for your own safety".

### **But why spend so much effort on control?**

This is a frequent reaction that I receive from non-martial artists. "How do you learn to fight by learning not to hit?", they ask. Well firstly, it isn't not learning not to hit, it's learning to hit precisely, with exactly the amount of force necessary to get your job done, whether that job is cutting someone down for real or merely freeplaying with intent. Both require the same level of control despite the notions of power prevalent in modern HEMA. The many deceptive practices available in Meyer's art absolutely require control of a kind only attainable through long hours of drilling and training. Striking a Zornhau is easy, but being able to recover after failing at that Zornhau or being able to adapt mid-strike (Indes!) requires pin-point accuracy in both distance and power generation. Zucken, for example, is itself the very art of *not* striking through a target with uncontrolled force and power. This skill is needed to push the opponent into errors of form and defense, and works by drawing him out of position with attacks to his openings specifically designed to uncover a target for the final or ending attack. Without control this *will not work*. Zucken is just one of the many Handworks that require a high degree of control to use effectively.

Let's put it into a bit of perspective with some modern applications of control by examining three modern combat sports: mixed martial arts, boxing, and stick-fighting

MMA is pretty pervasive these days and draws heavily from other combat sports. If you pay attention to the training regimens of professional fighters, you will see that it's not all slam-bang knock-down drag-out fights in every training session. This is true even when focusing exclusively on striking—you will find training camps focusing on easy sparring as much as heavy bag work or pad work—the risks of injury swinging for the fences are not desirable from an economic standpoint nor from a preparation standpoint, and there is as much attribute development available from slower paced or less power-focused work outs. That is not to say one should ignore the heavy hand training—that is of course important, but not to an exclusive extent. Likewise we do not need to smash each other down in every fencing match, and thereby force ourselves into having to pad up for safety (or rather, the illusion of safety since it doesn't actually exist).

Boxing too does not simply focus on power-punching all the time; there are training sessions which focus on speed, accuracy, defense, power, footwork, etc. All of these attributes put together increase power, not simply practicing hitting harder, and in fact form is often the element of training that will

increase power the most. Boxers train to use stance and positioning to maximize power in addition to heavy bag work and heavy-handed sparring.

Stick-fighting (Filipino Kali/Escrima) is a Southeast Asian combat sport developed from the root fencing art and applied to sticks. Filipino martial arts probably spend more time than most arts working through an increasingly complex set of drills designed to teach precision footwork, timing, distance and other important attributes. Through these drills which allow them to play very hard and fast with each other even while they maintain very safe levels of control, they prepare the mind and body for the challenges of combat and build an impressive list of attributes which apply directly to the chaos of combat. Interestingly, they also divide the types of strikes up in much the same manner that Meyer does in his various works on combat.

No single method captures everything for any of these combat sports, though; it could almost be said that one of the defining aspects of a combat sport (aside from its connection to a martial art) is a varied approach to developing attributes complimentary to that martial art and by extension its sportive form. It is especially true of weapon-based combat sports and martial arts that there is no definitive method for conducting simulated combat that accurately reflects the realities of combat. But then, this is pretty much true even of unarmed martial arts: for all its realism, MMA is still not a street fight and so even though it is a wonderful combat sport, transferring skill from the sporting event to the reality of the street requires some adjustment and training specific to that reality. One way to get closer to your weapon art is making freeplay as close to the reality of combat as possible, and the only reliable way of doing so is mimicking how they did it back in the Renaissance. The sportive fencing in this period was developed by masters who possessed battlefield experience and a connection to living martial arts traditions, and it was designed using this knowledge to prepare others for the rigors of combat.

But before we all run off and have “control” t-Shirts made, let’s consider some research evidence from our decade of combat sport interpretation.

### **Our research and experience with this subject.**

Our experience doing freeplay using minimal —or better yet, no protection at all—has taught us that until you are forced to use a specific tool (the sword) to solve your problems of defense and offense, you will alter the art to fit your reality. When we first used steel weapons with no gloves or masks, that was the week we truly learned how to keep ourselves safe. Ultimately, the protection of masks and padding was an illusion and was not real safety—only the true art was safety.

In our eight years as an ARMA group, we freeplayed first with padded swords exclusively and later transitioned to wooden waisters. Our purchase of Albion Meyer training swords really opened up the reality of the sword to us for the first time, and suddenly a lot of the material we had studied began to click. With prompting from John Clements, we were one of the few ARMA groups to embrace his notion that you could freeplay without any protection whatsoever, and do it safely if you prepared for it and had faith in your skills—but you had to train hard to get the requisite control. To the credit of John Clements he was dead right about its effect on the art of your fencing. Having only a sword to use to

defend ourselves under pressure really brought out the root of the art and propelled us into proper use of the sword, as portrayed in the plates in Meyer's books. Now that we have gained more knowledge about Meyer's art and researched the tools and other important elements of the Fechtschulen and the schools that supported them, we have come to see these plates as the reality we are seeking. They are the only piece of the art that can be fully reconstructed.

Now it is part of our curriculum to at some point take off the gloves and the masks and freeplay with control. This introduces the level of respect for the weapon that should apply to Fechtschule-style fencing. This is not the dangerous event some suppose it to be; Fechtschule events were held wet or dry but in both cases this was appropriate to the situation on both ends of the spectrum of safety. It was appropriately dangerous to engender a healthy respect for what you are doing and appropriately safe to allow people to do it with control and not destroy their livelihood. Now there is a statistical reality to playing this close to the edge of the cliff, and it must be used as an attribute building activity just like all other methods of learning fencing. I believe the reality to be somewhere around –15-20% of your freeplay time should be spent in this “naked” form of fencing. Not at first, of course—much time must first be spent in drilling and training to learn control before slowly entering into this naked fencing and then slowly ratcheting up the speed and intent to extend the attribute building. The rest of our time should be spent in normal, protected fencing to solidly ingrain the lessons learned in naked fencing. I find that under most circumstances you will see better use of your cross, sword, footwork, and body positioning to defend yourself. These are the sorts of skills necessary in the days of real fencing application. As long as we aspire to the skills of the Fechtschule fencers, we should respect and attend earnestly to the lessons they have left us in history, and to some extent step into their world. It is not the safety madness some think it to be.

If you take your average nylon-weapon fencing tournament, there are usually a few broken fingers despite over-attention to padding and other supposed safety measures. This does not tend to drastically change when the tournament method switches to steel. Steel commands an appropriate amount of respect on both ends of the art of striking, and the faster out you throw your hands the harder they can get hit. Respect is naturally more heightened, but apparently not enough due to the illusion of padding as safety. This is unfortunate, because I find that control is as much a part of the art as any specific handwork or technique. Without control, we cannot execute many of the deceptions taught in the art—deceptions that were central to the Fechtschule arts of combat,

So enough of the excuses for it, what about its actual application? How do we qualify bad and good control? Good control is roughly 80 - 90 % speed and power below 50%, power that is broken by contact with the opponent (a break of the wrist), by that I mean not following through with the body and weapon thereby taking the follow through and power out of the strike. Not the same way you would fight with a steel feder against a well protected individual (as at, say, Swordfish); that is much more power than would be used for a good blunt bout with no protection. For example, if you use federschwerts and only allow flat strikes, suddenly you can ramp up the speed and even power of the strikes significantly. The flex in the end of the blades makes striking a lot faster safer due to the time allowed by the flex of the blade to respond to the fact you just hit someone.

This sort of strike is not only used for safety, but is the root of the Zucken handwork and is, as Meyer says, “the beginning of all deception”. We have captured this essence of control in this drill designed by Curt Dunham ( <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8doo9OPpdJY> ).

Bad control is anything forcefully driving through the target in any significant manner; most serious martial artists have control, and it's just the mental decision to use it that must be trained. Obviously the target and the opportunity have a significant effect on the level of control needed. Hands tend to require more delicacy even when hitting with control and pinpoint accuracy and measure is required to safely do it, remembering that the greatest danger comes from the chaos of two opposing forces meeting in the middle. We do not know what an opponent will do, so consideration must be given to the chaos of combat. Good control means care for your opponent, while having no care for the opponent's well being when entering into the dance of fencing is bad control.

Consider your partner; just as you evaluate an opponent when you prepare a strategy to defeat them, you should evaluate your training partner and not act out of balance with their skills. Typically the higher-skilled person is able to control the match enough to allow a less skilled person more freedom in the fight.

### **Now let's talk about Blossen, or wet and dry play in the Fechtschulen.**

This is seen as a savage activity by most modern HEMA enthusiasts, but is it really as dangerous as we perceive it to be? Considering that it has taken much of HEMA around a decade to get into using steel blunts, perhaps we are not the best ones to be evaluating the dangerous nature of a Fechtschule. My own personal opinion on this is that a Blossen fight, or fight to the "red bloom" (first blood at the temple), would hardly be a caveman-like affair and would in all probability be a snipping, slicing, sliding, and binding affair, ending with a quick slice rather than a thunk of metal into flesh. My bet is that once a slightly sharp edge is introduced, the need for slamming away with power will diminish as the need to slice at the crown becomes paramount.

The first casualty of fencing with steel blunts sans mask, helmet, and gloves is *ego*. We must toss out the need to win at all costs, the need to hit first, and give as much credence to our own safety as we do to winning. This is what the art is—anyone can hit with a sword, but fencing is so much more and as with most arts is much more complex than we first see at the surface; you must enter into it to learn it, you will not learn by watching it, nor by talking about it, nor can you change the reality of danger to avoid it. Danger and fear are elements of fencing that we learn from, and they must not be removed entirely from the process.

Yes, we live in a litigious society and people have unreasonably low expectations of safety while learning combat sports. Honestly, this is because society is stupid and we cannot allow its stupidity to infect our art, else we risk it being watered down again as it already once was. We have to be willing to accept risks for our art, just as any art allows for risk. Proper common sense should determine what is safe, not the fears of the inexperienced. That's right, you heard me: the end result of this article is simple. Let me bold it out and underline it so you make no mistake of my point here:

**The future of HEMA is in Fechtschule-style events with no protection whatsoever, naked fencing at the same levels our ancestors did.**

Nothing less is acceptable if we seek the art. Now, how far that will go in mainstream HEMA is another matter, but maybe that's why it's called "mainstream" and maybe that's not the only consideration here. We have a right to our art as we see it in the fechtschule, if the SCA and Adria

Empires can bash each other in the head with maces and there can be reality shows for MMA and hardcore Jousting. What is wrong with us taking our art to its conclusion in the fechtschule if we can develop a safe method of doing it from the blueprint of history.

A quote from the Clint Eastwood movie *Outlaw Josey Wales* comes to mind:  
*“Don't piss down my back and tell me it's raining.”*

If the ultimate goal of HEMA is commercial success, then it will work in direct opposition to those of us seeking the art. In that case, there needs to be a division out the world of HEMA that is not concerned with making money. If the art lies outside the mainstream's understanding, we will only cast what we have down into the terrible depths of uselessness. I didn't get into HEMA to make money, sell books, make a chain of schools, or work in the movies. I came to this because I saw a chance to resurrect our cultural heritage through the art of fencing, a long dead but incredible science left to us by our ancestors. It is alive and we can be part of it if we are willing to pay the price of the ferryboat ride.

I want what I see in the plates, and I will not apologize for that; make no mistake, however: we are not ready for it yet, I see no one yet able to handle what they did, and that's probably going to take years more training and drilling and fighting. But we must begin to think towards this reality and not settled for a padded, sterilized version of what our ancestors were able to do. We are not less than them unless we make ourselves so through fear.

Our goal as a guild is to build pools of our two current rankings, Fechter and Freyfechter, until we have a solid base of 30 Freyfechters to begin to prepare for a rank of Kunst Fechter. This rank will have to fight naked (unprotected) for his prize against 30 Freyfechters and ideally 50 Fechters. Then we can begin to consider ourselves to be walking the same path Master Joachim Meyer tread upon; even if we are only getting one toe on the road, it's better than sitting by the side of the road looking at the path with no method to get there. We see this as our future and hope to see others walk upon this path with us. I believe time will prove our faith in our arts correct if we are mindful of what we are doing and hold the proper skills paramount. Control, respect, hard work, research, and discipline.

### **Blah Blah Blah, so what's the solution?**

That is the hardest part, we need to realize just how little we actually know. But until we hold ourselves up to what we know of them, we are not measuring shit. What they did is plainly there in the imagery of the manuals, we have no reason to doubt this other than our own fears and mental constructs we have built around this art to excuse our inability to go where it actually resided. I am saying we need to measure the art by, at the very least, the Fechtschule; it's a demonstrably effective and historical method for the learning the art of combat, and by that I mean specifically fencing naked (unprotected) in tournaments. In my opinion, when we can do this we are finally practicing the art.

What holds us back is a double-sided discrimination against the Fechtschule method of fencing. On the one hand we have “battle field elitists” with the notion that it was a gutted and useless fencing method because they didn't just kill each other. Meanwhile, on the other hand we have the “that's insane” crowd who see everything but Michelin-man-style preparation as unsafe. Well, both are wrong and as usual the truth lies in the middle of extremes. We *can* play safe at these levels and therein lies the art. We cannot ignore that fact that the Fechtschulen came right after the battlefield

usage of the longsword, and its art was still well known amongst those who used it. They adapted the art to the sport somewhat as is usual in combat sports, but it still retained its artful nature. All the techniques and handworks we learn today were taught in the Fechtschule method fencing.

We currently run the risk of letting ourselves get into a mindset that accepts kendo-like adaptation of the combat sport so that it comes to hardly represent the art anymore. We have a marvelous history of relatively safe fighting events with supporting schools to draw from. Our ancestors did not use fencing masks or gloves to fence, not at the time of the great fencing schools. Even in a more elaborate art-infused teaching like that of Paulus Hector Mair, only a few of the images contain gloved participants and none contain masks. Why?

One of the things we tend to do with knowledge in the modern world is cycle it always forwards, as if mere survival means righteousness. We do not know how they did this art, and if we are not even playing in the same way as they did, how could we even begin to measure their art against ours. We need to have a vision of HEMA that matches that of our ancestors. Everything we have done up to now is great, the tournaments are great, the schools everywhere is great, the books are great, but is the art great? We must keep pushing towards where they stood, and in so doing push against the general desire to disallow what we consider unsafe as a society even when we are ignorant of the issues at hand. Is this sort of event any less safe than a football match at high school, or a mixed martial arts, boxing, kickboxing, wrestling, Judo, Kendo, or fencing match? Each one has some ratio of risk that's acceptable to the participants. If we can demonstrate acceptable safety equipment (such as safety goggles or other eye-pro) and a level of control carefully developed through extensive hours of training, then we can do this with minimal risk. Remember the safety is only as good as the control, though, so it cannot be done in the same way as a standard tournament. Ego would be at its most dangerous in a tournament environment, and this cannot be acceptable under any circumstances. This is the reason for the strict disciplines of the Ritterlich Kunst, long hard hours in service to the art—much, much longer than anyone is doing today—and much greater character discipline and dedication to the art and to one's fellows through that art. Competitiveness is a great thing, but unchecked it degrades the general environment into a simple "Me, me, me!" environment. We must have as much care for the other fighter as we have for ourselves and this is why we train, not just to be faster and stronger but also to have more precision and control. We must meet in the middle of all out striking and all out defense, we must have the control to do either at a slight intention in the mind. This takes far more training I think than any of us today possess. Without the motivational force of imminent death and/or dismemberment we are not as focused on it. (Perhaps if a Zombie Apocalypse comes we will all get a chance to use our arts more effectively and realistically, even though Zombies don't really fence...)

We can develop this art in the same way they did, by doing what they did. A good start is to begin to trust in your weapon more, shed the gloves once in a while, shed the mask once in a while. Shed everything once in a while and fence like they did. You can start with minimal gloves and work your way to it.

The fear you have now for your face, head and hands is the real fear of danger to them from what you are engaging in, so use that fear to make you a better fencer both by overcoming it and by adapting it into motivation for your defense. Suddenly hitting alone is not as important anymore, and suddenly all the teachings about Buffeling make sense. Why they did everything they did makes more

sense, this is about as close to fighting with a sword as you can get—our ancestors got there, and they left us a treasure map to get there also. Unfortunately, we are all dazzled with the pretty pictures and filled with modern concepts of this and that. We think that our magnificent fencing arts were lost to us, or that the preserved lineages of the East can give them life, but I say both East and West lost their arts to time and lineage. Fortunately, our ancestors left us a map to get the art back to us if we choose to take it. (That same map also exists in the East but in a less developed form.) In both cases we learn more from studying the past than we do playing around in the present under the present day's notions of what fighting is.

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-Mike Cartier Dec 12<sup>th</sup> 2011  
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