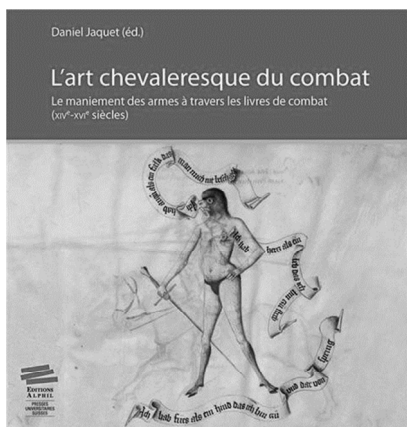


Daniel Jaquet (ed.),
L'art chevaleresque du combat: Le maniement des armes à travers
les livres de combat (XIV^e–XVI^e siècles),
Neuchâtel: Éditions Alphil-Presses universitaires suisses,
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Reviewed by Ken Mondschein



This handsome volume, edited by Daniel Jaquet, who recently completed his PhD thesis on the subject of *Fechtbücher*, is a welcome contribution to the literature of the history of fencing and personal combat. Concentrating on the medieval tradition of fencing books – with an obvious and necessary emphasis on Germany, but with excursions to Italy – it nicely complements Pascal Brioist, Hervé Drévilion, and Pierre Serna’s 2002 *Croiser le Fer*,¹ which had a distinct focus on early modern France, and provides a Francophone addition to the German-language works by Hils and Bauer. Most importantly, it continues

the project of proving these sources worthy of scholarly attention and adds the modern historiography first begun by Sydney Anglo in his 2000 *Martial Arts of Renaissance Europe*.²

In his introduction, Daniel Jaquet details both the subject itself and its milieu, giving a typology of fencing books examining their intended audience and their status as objects. He also raises some historiographical issues, pointing out that the periodization of swordsmanship does not fit neatly into academics’ neatly defined categories of “medieval” and “Renaissance.” Most importantly, Jaquet shows that these works reflect the *mentalité* of their times, fixing gesture and practice in a written form cognate with the pedagogical model most familiar to the intended audience. However, we cannot truly know the authors’ intent, which, to judge from the evidence, was polyvalent: not just war or the duel, but also self-defense and even kidnapping. This problematization prepares the field for the excellent essays that follow.

¹ Pascal Brioist, Hervé Drévilion and Serna, Pierre, *Croiser le Fer: Violence et Culture de l'Épée dans la France Moderne (XV^e–XVIII^e Siècle)* (Paris: Champ Vallon. 2002).

² Sydney Anglo, *The Martial Arts of Renaissance Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

The rest of the book is divided into three sections: Civilian combat (*Le combat civil*), or fighting out of armor; fighting in armor; and fighting on horseback. The first essay, Fabrice Cognot's "*Par-delà formes et fonctions: approches techniques et théoriques de l'épée et des autres armes du Moyen Âge occidental*," considers the sword itself as an object. Cognot provides a very good surmise of not just the current thinking and scientific research on the manufacture of weapons, but also the socio-cultural environment in which such production took place. He also considers the sword as a potent cultural symbol and the way in which its construction can inform us of its intended use.

Pierre-Alexander Chaize's "*Quand la pratique est Logique. Clés de lecture pour aborder la tradition liechtenauerienne*" is notable for being the best and most concise explanation I have read of Aristotelian philosophy in the teaching verses of the enigmatic fencing master Johannes Liechtenauer, who flourished at some point before the late fourteenth century. After a brief overview of the material and textual tradition, Chaize details the structure and content of the Liechtenauer verses, their organization and tactical logic, and, most importantly, how the author used the language of Aristotle—particularly his definition of time as “the number of the motion with respect to the before and after” in the *Physics* and his thoughts on opposition from the *Organon*—to explain the mechanics of fencing in the contemporary intellectual idiom. Similarly, Chaize makes a strong argument that Liechtenauer's *kunst des fechtens* is defined by a similar logical opposition and subordinating of postures and guards.

Similarly, Gilles Martinez gives an excellent overview of the logical structure of the 1410 *Flower of Battle* of the Friulian master Fiore dei Liberi (fl. c. 1350–c. 1420). After the requisite overview of Fiore's life, Martinez examines this master's signature martial techniques, his description of combative movement, his martial and social context, and his legacy to later masters such as Filippo Vadi. The essay is enlivened by reproductions of many illustrations from Fiore's four manuscripts, and by Vadi's continuation of the manuscript tradition. However, Martinez only touches briefly on the rich symbolism in Fiore's work—particularly its use as an organizational scheme, which has been examined in great detail in other books, such as Robert Charrette's *Fiore dei Liberi's Armizare*.³

Franck Cinato and the late André Surprenant examine the oldest known European work on personal combat, Royal Armouries MS I.33 (also known as the *Liber de Arte dimicatoria*). As the title of their essay “L'escrime à la boele comme méthode d'autodéfense selon le *Liber de Arte dimicatoria*” implies, they see the purpose of this manuscript as teaching a form of self-defense; however, I personally think it equally likely that I.33 teaches a form of recreational swordplay. The essay would also be more complete had they had access to the recent codicological examination, which showed that some folios are certainly missing from the manuscript.⁴ That aside, Cinato and

³ Robert Charrette, *Fiore dei Liberi's Armizare* (Wheaton: Freelance Academy Press, 2010).

⁴ Detailed in Jeffrey Forgeng's forthcoming second edition of his edition of I.33.

Suprenant's successfully explain I.33, with its fencing clerics and enumerations of actions, as a product of Scholastic thought.

Olivier Dupuis, in his essay "*Des conteaux à clous ou pourquoi l'épée seule est si peu représentée dans les jeux d'épées et livres de combat au Moyen Age*" both raises and answers a very good, but not very obvious, question. Drawing on his exhaustive archival research into fencing games held in his native Strasbourg, as well as his excellent knowledge of the *Fechtbücher*, Dupuis asks why the single-handed sword—the stereotypical knightly weapon—appears little in our sources. He concludes that by the *Fechtbücher* period, while the longsword remained primary, the machete-like *Messer* had taken pride of place from the ubiquitous medieval sword and buckler, partially because of its martial effectiveness, and partially for reasons of fashion. Along the way, he gives a terrific overview of one-handed sword and *Messer* techniques.

The second and third sections of the book are composed of only two essays each. The second part, on armored combat (*Le combat en armure*), is led off by Nicolas Baptiste's "L'armure et ses typologies. Étude comparée des représentations et des objets." Baptiste rightfully points out that to fully understand medieval armor, we need to look not only at surviving pieces, but also art—especially since some of the armor depicted in fencing treatises does not survive, or does so only in singular examples. He also admits the terminological difficulties—the name by which we call an object today is not necessarily the name employed by its original user. Most importantly, he shows that armor existed, as an object, in a particular sociocultural field—that is, combat, which is best understood via the *Fechtbücher*. Fencing-books thus give us an indispensable insight into how these objects ought to be considered. Museum administrators who have found themselves suddenly in possession of large collections of arms and armor would do well to remember that this context is key to properly interpreting these objects.

The editor himself, Daniel Jaquet, continues the question of the utilization of armor in his "*Combattre à plaisance ou à outrance? Le combat en armure à pied d'après les textes fondateurs.*" Jaquet asks a fundamental question: Are the techniques in the *Fechtbücher* designed for the duel, or for more-or-less sportive encounters? After first reviewing the sources, mostly concentrating on Liechtenauer's verses and the German tradition and mentioning Fiore and Vadi only in passing, he examines the context of the judicial duel and the tournament, the specific arms for battle within the barriers, and the textual tradition. The armoured techniques in the *Fechtbücher*, he concludes, are more for earnest fighting than play. The reason for this—and the reason for the general obsession with the judicial duel in —opens up new avenues of research.

The third section, *Le combat à cheval*, consists of Loïis Forster's "*Le cheval d'armes,*" and Pierre-Henry Bas's "*Les plus périlleuses armes du monde sont à cheval et de la lance; car il n'y a point de holla': Introduction au combat équestre d'après les sources germaniques, XV^e–XVI^e siècles.*" In the first of these, Foster considers the horse as a symbol, as well as a physical entity. The stature and training of warhorses, as well as their value, are all considered. Foster mainly relies on previously published works (Philippe Contamine, Brigitte Prévot, and

Bertrand Schnerb), and does not mention Ann Hyland's work, but gives a good overview of the realities that mounted warriors in the Middle Ages had to deal with. Bas' essay fills in Foster's outlines by showing how the German *Fechtbücher* instructed mounted warriors to actually fight. Beginning with an overview of other texts, such as Duarte and Wallhausen, and moving to the manuscripts of Paulus Hector Mair and the later Liechtenauer tradition, he gives a good summary of the sources. Bas also examines the practical aspects of horsemanship, including biting and other tack; weapons employed; and techniques and tactics. He does not overly dwell on particulars, but moves along in a sprightly manner to cover all the important points. Overall, Bas' essay works well with Foster's to provide a very good overview of a very complex subject.

Overall, Jaquet's volume is very well conceived and executed, and is a welcome addition to the literature on personal combat. More importantly, it shows not only that such scholarly works must be taken seriously by academics, but that reconstructionists and martial artists, as well as historians and philologists, have something valuable to say about the subject.