



Jeffrey L. Forgeng, *The Art of Swordsmanship by Hans Lecküchner (Armour and Weapons, 4)*, Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2015, 453p. ISBN 978-1-78327-028-6. Dimensions: 23.4 x 15.6 cm

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Fourth volume of the new collection “Armour and Weapons” directed by Kelly DeVries, this translation of the Hans Lecküchner treatise on unarmoured combat with the *Langes Messer* (“Long knife”, translated by the author as “Falchion”) is another welcomed addition for reference work for Historical European Martial Arts studies. It follows a series of translations by the author, namely the translation of the anonymous *Liber de arte dimicatoria* (2003-2013) and Joachim Meyer, *Grundtliche Beschreibung...* (2006-2015), and several forthcoming titles. Currently the curator for Arms and Armours at the Worcester Art Museum and an Adjunct Professor at Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Jeffrey L. Forgeng is a great connoisseur of the Fight Book corpus and his contribution on the field of study is noteworthy¹. He is one of the few undertaking the arduous task of translation of these technical texts, providing useful reference works for the practitioner and the scholar alike.

The volume offers an English translation (p. 1-432), preceded by a short introduction (p. ix-xxviii), and followed by a Glossary with a German-English word list (p. 433-443), two Appendixes (Dedicatory Letter to Philip the Upright, p. 444-445; Table of the structure of the treatise with concordance to other texts, p. 446) and a bibliography (p. 447-453). The translation is accompanied by all images from the manuscript referred to as M (München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cgm 582), cropped to include only the pairs of fighters, in a rather small black and white format.

The introduction presents the author and its text (p. x-xii), places its work in the context of the other related bodies of technical literature (p. x-xii, xv-xviii, xx-xxi), identifying him as one of the “three chief authorities” of German Medieval art of fighting (p. ix, the two other being Johannes Liechtenauer and Master Ott). It also discusses the weapon (p. xii-

¹ Apart from his translations, see his research paper Kiermayer, Alex, and Jeffrey Forgeng, “The Chivalric Art”: German Martial Arts Treatises of the Middle Ages and Renaissance’, in *The Cutting Edge: Studies in Ancient and Medieval Combat*, ed. by Barry Molloy (Stroud: Tempus, 2007), pp. 153–67 and Forgeng, Jeffrey, ‘Owning the Art: The German Fechtbuch Tradition’, in *The Noble Art of the Sword: Fashion and Fencing in Renaissance Europe 1520-1630*, ed. by Tobias Capwell (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2012), pp. 164–75.

xviii), the manuscript tradition (p. xvii-xix), and proposes several caveats for the interpretation of the text (p. xxi-xxv). This introductory part provides the reader with clear and straight to the point elements. It works as a survey, flying over different issues, most of the time well referenced with the secondary literature discussing those – but lacking the critical description of the different theses of the latter, probably for the sake of brevity². Noteworthy, as in his other publication, the translator tends to attribute alternative titles to Fight Books – mainly for compendiums –, based on the history of their ownership, rather than on the problematic authorial attribution³.

The translation – without edition of the Middle High German text – is seeking to “present the fullest and clearest possible version of Lecküchner’s techniques as documented in the two principal medieval sources” (p. xxvii). The translator provide the reader with variants from H, “when these might prove of interest”, and with comparative samples to S⁴, “just enough to sketch out this third, intermediate redaction [...]” (p. xxvii). Such choices enhance the value of the translation, but also diminish the value of such an editorial work for academic research purpose, since most of the editorial additions is not systematically done – or exhaustively indicated in a proper apparatus. He also discusses the philological tradition, stating that neither M nor H are direct author’s productions and that the *urtext* on to M and H are probably based is today missing (p. xix). He comments as well on the copies or influences to later texts (up to 1679). A stemma codicum for a more clear visualisation or a more exhaustive table than the one on the appendix B (p. 446) would have been welcomed to support these complex connections and would have added value to the editorial work done. This is then neither a translation alone (of a unicum or a print, such as his previous translations), neither a critical edition, but somewhere in the middle⁵.

² For example, little is said on the theses of Jan-Dirk Müller article analysing the content and the production of these treatises. Several footnotes listing almost exhaustively reference material are to be found, but with no critical discussion about these.

³ E.g. “Starrhemberg” for Rome, Biblioteca dell’Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei e Corsiniana, Cod. 44 A 8 or “Balder” for Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod. Guelf. 78.2 Aug. 20. This is fine for compendia (e.g. also done by Rainer Welle for his 2014 edition of Augsburg, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. I.6.4°.2, referenced as “von Baumann’s Fechtbuch”), however it is less for other compendia referenced by the translator to one of the contributor or compiler (see bibliography, for “Dobringer, Lew, Speyer, Ringeck”). Since there is no distinction between the two methods for attributing titles, this is resulting in adding more confusion than clarity.

⁴ Hans von Speyer, 1491. Salzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, M.I.29. Identified as a complete copy (p. xix-xx, reference to S in footnote 37).

⁵ There is no critical edition available. Grzegorz Zabinski, Russ Mitchell and Falko Fritz offered in an online self-published document a synoptical edition of M and H, as well as English translation of the two versions. See Zabinski, Russel and Fritz, *A Falchion / Langes Messer Fencing Treatise by Johannes Lecküchner (1482), 2012* (online <http://www.hammaborg.de/pdf/transkriptionen/leckuechner_cgm582/zabinski_mitchell_fritz_leckuechner.pdf>, accessed 08 September 2015), 636p. This work is not referenced in the reviewed book.

The practitioner will enjoy this book for the accessibility to the original material carefully translated, referenced according to folia and to the numbered *stücke* (combat sequences), with the illustration in regard to the text. The scholar will enjoy this book for the quality of the translation provided by a trusted author, but might be disappointed by some of the author's editorial choices, e.g. for not including the edition of the original text or for being not systematic in the apparatus when comparing versions and offering concordances.