



Daniel Jaquet and Nicolas Baptiste (eds),
Expérimenter le maniement des armes à la
fin du Moyen Âge/ Experimente zur
Waffenhandhabung im Spätmittelalter
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This book is drawn from a colloquium and is part of the collection “Itinera” of the Swiss Journal for History (Revue Suisse d'Histoire). It gathers the works of several authors from different horizons who share a common purpose: to prove that experimentation of technical combat gestures and their associated equipment can have a scientific method and become part of the academic field of research. The spectrum of the authors' profiles is broad: from academics researchers, historians (D. Jaquet, N. Baptiste, G. Martinez, P.-H. Bas, L. Forster), sociologists (A. Tuailon-Demésy), and German philologists (T. Wilkens), to passionate amateur researchers (O. Gourdon, A. Selosse, S. Delachaux). At first, publishing professional and amateur work alongside may seem out of place but the seriousness and conscientiousness of the papers – professional and amateur alike – in this academic publication validates its plan. Two observations are to be found. The first one is that experimentation naturally arises from the study of fight books, military and martial material. The second is the fact that experimentation does not hold a strong place in academia. Here lies the brilliantly taken bet of this book. Experimentation already has a place in the Living History world, both for re-enactment or Historical European Martial Arts (HEMA). Through the alliance of both professional and amateur researchers, this first of its kind piece of work acts as a stepping stone to rise experimentation to a scientific level. One may feel that the depth of potential still hiding behind its articles, asks to be better highlighted in the future. For this to happen, theoretical work, both methodological, epistemological, and practical work in establishing scientific experimental protocols are required. Both aspects are covered by the authors.

The book is divided into three distinct parts, each introduced by a theoretical article followed by articles with a more hands on approach.

The first part covering HEMA starts with an article by A. Tuailon-Demésy who questions the idea of an “approach-process” (“démarche-processus”). She points out the vagueness of experimentation, considered as a common base, and identifies its multiple means and ends, from an ancient written martial art to a modern sport. Next, Thore Wilkens' article goes back over three publications (T. Stangier, 2009; J.-D. Müller, 1992;

R. Welle, 1993), allowing him to put into perspective the absence of consideration for the fight books' practical function. He introduces prerequisites for a scientific experimentation as transparent as possible, supporting his assertions with the example of a wrestling play. The author hopes that such an approach may be taken for future fight book editions. The following article deals with gesture and combat technique for a foot soldiers, looking to answer questions risen from interrogations given by iconographic and textual sources from the 11th to 13th century. Gilles Martinez exposes a three step experimental methodology: historical analysis collects, studies, and problematizes sources; a pre-experimental cycle serves as a double doorway between the analysis and the experience itself, providing a first calibration; then, the experimental cycle proceeds to testing experiences which produce data that has to be processed and analysed with respect to the sources. The chapter ends with an article from P.-H. Bas which brings together two authors from the middle of the 16th century: an Augsburgger whose work is turned to the past, Paulus Hector Mair and the Roman Camillo Agrippa, innovator of his time. Between the practicality of Agrippa and the exhaustive ambition of Mair, the study of the technical plays' characteristics allows to identify their application context and their efficiency. The reading of these works leads us to the idea of a system, in which the two authors proceed to a reduction, in art for one, in science for the other. Finally, the article's author suggests to read Mair with Agrippa's scientificity to ascertain new understandings for experimentation.

The second part of the book starts with an article from Daniel Jaquet. The author explores the fight books' partition between armoured and unarmoured combat with a focus on kinesiology. The author's experimental protocol aims at two objectives: analysing energy expenditure – previously studied – and limitation of movements in the three plans of space. He explores the latter with an armour made in accordance with experimental archaeology, and provides interpretations comforting the idea of a medieval technological, functional and well thought-out armour. In the following article, Olivier Gourdon starts with collecting explicit and implicit comments about the cutting edge of the *gladium emolutum* from various sources (fight books – particularly ms. I.33 (Leeds) –, legislative documents, archaeological material, iconography). After a precise description of the material that was used and of the test's course, the author analyses the cutting mechanisms (cut, gash, thrust, false or true edge) and target configurations (naked, covered in linen or leather). The experience's feedback clarifies the diverse historical vocabulary. Going back to the sources, Olivier Gourdon raises the question of the absence of a specific posture present in historical iconographies but absent of ms. I.33 to answer it by identifying this cut as an accessory tool in the making. The last article of the second part is about horse riding and its equipment, a specific discipline which increases the variables (horseman and mount) within the martial arts classification. Indeed, the horse riding art is not mentioned, thought as presupposed in the technical combat literature. The author, Loï's Forster, studies the essential of the subject making the link between the two beings: the saddle. He mainly follows the king of Portugal Dom Duarte's technical work concerning different horse riding styles (*Brawante*, *Gineta*, bareback riding), to which he joins afterwards other

iconographic and textual sources. From this, the author draws assumptions about medieval military horse riding which he goes on to experiment. Analysis of sources and experimentation allow for a critical look over previous studies on medieval horse riding.

The third and final part of the work starts with an article from Nicolas Baptiste. He goes over experimentation as practiced in exact sciences, which historians are not used to, and its link with historical commemorations and private collections. Retracing 19th and 20th century experiences aiming at reconstructing armours from between 1330 and 1530, he distinguishes science-based acts (hydraulic hammer in the abbey of Fontenay), those linked with cultural mediation (public demonstrations in Leeds) and private experiences (Tobias Capwell or Mike Loades). Additionally, the authors point out the issue of the actual “historical” tools – originals, copies and imitations –, the events that they crossed from their original condition. The author then lays out the required conditions for scientific experimentation and follows the course he believes it should follow. On this subject there are a lot of variations in personal experiences. The following article from Antoine Seloise is one of them and is about a military garment from the late Middle Ages: the brigandine. After referring to the historical preserved pieces and classifying them in three groups, the author sets out the steps of reconstructing a brigandine from analysing authentic pieces. After fifteen years of experiences with several reconstituted pieces for cultural events, he relates the findings, and shares his assumptions and thoughts. The book ends with the article of Simon Delachaux on the “Artillery Project” (“Projet Artillerie”), aiming at building a fifteenth-century artillery piece. The project came to be through the collaboration between living History practitioners and scientists, who noticed a lack of artillery pieces in re-enactment. Receiving support of heritage institutions, the project is growing in the long run. From the preserved pieces, the reconstitution grows in coordination with scientists, amateurs and selected craftsmen. Once completed, the reconstituted piece will be used by historians to study the construction and handling of artillery pieces during the late Middle Ages.

This work invites itself into the debate about the legitimacy and the scientificity of experimentation, by answering issues coming in the disciplinary field. Far from engaging in the debate, the book clearly announces its position over a number of different articles. It must be said that the study of combat gestures is particularly prone to this kind of research, as it belongs to a practical field. Gestural experimentation is inspired by the concept of experimental archaeology which suits the studies of fight books, and stands at the crossroads of history (social, cultural, of art, of techniques, etc.) and hands on practice. The work defies the historiography and the historical school of thought which denies experimentation as a scientific tool.

In front of the vast field of study, the authors introduce a thought linked to their respective speciality and exemplifying it with the help of experiences made after the establishment of a protocol. The collusion between academic and amateur researchers forges a strong link between all actors of the wider historical field but does bring doubts about the undertaking reinforced by the apparent lack of a common definition for

experimentation. The variety of subjects leads the authors to give their own view on the matter. The emerging impression of fragility does not strengthen its argument for scientificity. Nonetheless, this only diversity demonstrates that Gestural experimentation has a plural definition and multiple potential applications.

One defines the words to use and delimits their object. The dangerous challenge to set up experimentation within the scientific field could not be conclusive without the conscience, clarity and objectivity that the authors have towards the limits of their subject. The many limits identified can push the reader to wonder about the validity of such an undertaking, its vulnerability and potential development. In order not to give way to a breach in scientificity, the authors prove themselves to be precise and develop their demonstrations with caution. Thus, the footnotes – varying from thirteen to fifty-seven – comfort the reader into the authors' projects and places his speech within a wider scientific and historiographic theory. The work's ambition would maybe have expected a more powerful anchorage in the historiography, either by longer footnotes or with a bibliography, which the reader could have expected.

The reader will appreciate the international nature that the book wants to follow: amidst francophone articles, a German article slips through and English summaries of each article concludes the book before the presentation of the authors.

Likewise, the close link to the documentary sources, as evident through the constant interactions between experimentation and historical sources, is a claimed marker of scientificity. Although some are confined to a purely illustrative function, fightbook images, diagrams and graphs – which are reminiscent of the so-called hard sciences – and photographs clarify and shed additional light on the authors' arguments.

Innovative in the field of study about the arts of combat, this gathering of articles carries a discourse with a strong scientific will within. Following a ternary plan, the book manages to join the scientific approach of experimentation (problem, protocol, experiences, results and data processing), with the historical object: the fighting arts and its offensive and defensive material. The limits are abundant, but the authors know how to identify them and stay on track in spite of them. The authors keep in sight the common objective to give experimentation its place in the field of the scientific research. The variety of approaches demonstrates the modular and plural nature of experimentation with its own tools, ready to be used in all areas where research calls it. This book will benefit historians, who will find arguments supporting the legitimacy of gestural experimentation, as well as amateurs who will find guidelines for defining and creating scientific experimentations.

To follow the words of the great historian and anthropologist Jean-Claude Schmitt – who prefaced this book –, “[...] they convinced me”¹.

¹ SCHMITT Jean-Claude, “Préface”, p. 6. (personal translation) : “[Si la démarche et son intitulé m'ont d'abord surpris,] ils m'ont convaincu”.