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The Nationalism of Joachim Meyer: An Analysis of German Pride in his Fighting Manual of
1570

A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of History

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In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in History

by

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May 2011

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ABSTRACT

The Nationalism of Joachim Meyer: An Analysis of German Pride in his Fighting Manual of

1570

by

William C. Adamson, Jr.

This work addresses the nationalistic elements in the 1570 work *Kunst des Fechtens* by Joachim Meyer of Strassburg. Meyer's teachings on the longsword are attached to the Swabian Johannes Liechtenauer and then transferred to the Italian rapier thus establishing Meyer as less concerned with nationalist purity as others of his century. His teachings are examined for their pleadings for moral conduct and the preservation of martial studies to the youth of Germany and the young Duke of Bavaria, Johann Casimir. Using modern examples alongside Meyer's writings the case is also made for the integration of nationalist sentiments, moral and ethical instruction, and martial arts training.

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Many people's support, assistance, and encouragement were vital in the production of this work. My own training in the actual use of the teachings contained in the fighting manuals that I analyze for nationalistic content was at the hands of various instructors, but most notably John Clements, Jacob Norwood, and Stewart Feil. My initial introduction to the structured study of martial arts was under the tutelage of Master Donna Harden-Tilley of Lee Brothers Taekwondo in Mebane, North Carolina. Crazy ideas about interpretations of techniques are frequently beaten out of me by my training partners in the Historical European Martial Arts Alliance and my own study group, Abingdon Historical Combat in Abingdon, Virginia. All of these people have contributed to my interest in the martial arts across cultural lines and has led me to the study of history. I'd like to thank the members of my committee, Dr. Dale Schmitt, Dr. Stephen Fritz, and especially my advisor and committee chair Dr. Brian Maxson. My son TR has been patient in dealing with my frequent absence throughout my graduate studies, and my daughter Gwen always has a smile for me when I'm feeling completely overwhelmed. Finally, I would be completely adrift if it were not for the unconditional love, support, encouragement, input, language assistance, editing, and occasional kick in the pants from my wife Dr. Christine Fleet.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the following work I identify elements of nationalistic sentiment in the sixteenth century fighting manual *A Thorough Description of the Free Knightly and Noble Art of Combat with All Customary Weapons, Adorned and Presented with Many Fine and Useful Illustrations* (known as *Kunst des Fechtens* or *The Art of Combat*) by Joachim Meyer published in 1570 in the Free-Imperial (Holy Roman Empire) City of Strassburg (now Strasbourg) in what is now the Alsace region of France.¹

The second chapter will set the context for Meyer's life and work and examine what was the character of Germany as an entity following the Reformation and how the longsword teachings of Johannes Liechtenauer formed a distinctively German system to fighting with the longsword. Liechtenauer's teachings form the basis of what is recognized as the German school of swordsmanship. Liechtenauer never wrote his teachings, but they were recorded by the priest Hänko Döbringer in 1389. Meyer's professional association was quite affected by the Reformation since the dominant fencing guild at the time, the *Marxbrüder*, was Catholic. Meyer predated the formation of their Protestant equivalent the *Federfechter*, although he may have been involved in their early formation, so he seems to have been successful without guild association. The Reformation figure Ulrich Von Hutten is introduced for his nationalistic prose since so much of what Germany was during Meyer's time was a result of that time. Meyer being a fighting man, a treatment of Hutten seems fitting.

¹ Joachim Meyer, *The Art of Combat: A German Martial Arts Treatise of 1570*, trans. Jeffery L. Forgeng (London: Greenhill Books, 2006).

The third chapter examines Italian influences in Meyer's 1570 treatise that offer evidence that Meyer was not averse to foreign influence when it meant the betterment of his craft within Germany. Meyer offers the most complete explanation of Liechtenauer's system and adds quite a bit of new observations himself. One of the things that Meyer goes to great lengths to relate is the reason that he is writing this manual. He wishes for the training of weapons not to disappear because of the development of machine driven warfare. Meyer connects the training of arms with the instilling of ideals that he sees as especially relevant to Germans. Whether these attributes are particular to the German people in reality is immaterial since this study is on the motivations of one man.

Meyer's work is unique amongst other fighting manuals for both its verbose treatment of Liechtenauer's teachings and its level of nationalistic sentiment that is attached to his identification of German ideals. The late sixteenth century was a time of comparative peace and subdued nationalist zeal between the nationalist tinged revolt against the Catholic Church in the Reformation and the utter trampling of Germany in the Thirty Years War.² The level of nationalistic sentiment is perhaps indicative of the time since Meyer is neither as zealous as Ulrich von Hutten nor as indifferent as Liechtenauer.

If we take Liechtenauer's system as far as terminology and organization as a uniquely German construct, then Meyer's use of the system with very little alteration has to be considered a nationalistic element. His admonition to the German youth and the Duke of Bavaria to live up to the ideals which are supposed to be learned and reinforced in the training of arms directly ties the systemic evidence to a nationalistic paradigm. Meyer takes a further step down the road of

² The Reformation as it occurred in Germany is nationalistic in nature because it was a movement against the outsider (Italian clerics) who was seen as being morally inferior and taking undue privileges with the more morally upright self (Germans).

the German nature of Liechtenauer's system by applying it to a foreign weapon with his treatment of the *rappier*.³ Despite the German prohibition on thrusting in their training environment, Meyer was able to produce a sound, understandable system using Liechtenauer's model with few modifications. In effect, Meyer made the Italian *rappier* German. A student of Meyer's could fit this foreign weapon into the nomenclature and organization as set down by the traditional author of the perceived German system, Liechtenauer.

Italian influences lend evidence to a limit to how nationalistic Meyer must have been. Strangely enough, there was some hint of Italian influence in the section concerning the dussack which is a weapon that has little evidence of use outside of Germany. Meyer states that he learned the *rappier* from Italian masters, so it would make sense that some Italian terminology or pedagogy would appear there, but such is not the case. It does however peek through in some guard names in the dussack section. These guard names appear in an early fifteenth century Italian manual known as *Fior di Battaglia* (The Flower of Battle) by Fiore dei Liberi and some other Italian longsword manuals.⁴ The appearance of such reinforces his expressed views as a more benign form of nationalism as expressed in the typology of the phenomenon put forth by Dekker, Malová, and Hoogendoorn, which is explained in chapter three, since he does not dismiss ideas and weapons of others simply because they are perceived outsiders.⁵

The fourth chapter makes the connection between nationalistic philosophies and training in the martial arts. Examples of how the two have existed together and either been lost or maintained in the East Asian as well as European models are illustrated. The modern

³ I refer to the rapier as *rappier* since that is the way that Meyer wrote it.

⁴ Fiore dei Liberi, *Fior de Battaglia*, Paul J. Getty Museum, 1410. The MS Ludwig XV 13 held by the Paul J. Getty Museum will be the copy of *Fior di Battaglia* used.

⁵ Henk Dekker, Darina Malova, and Sander Hoogendoorn, "Nationalism and Its Explanations," *Political Psychology* 24, no.2 (June 2003)

reconstruction of this connection in the United States military is discussed along with the reconstruction of the fighting arts as practiced by Meyer and his contemporaries by modern hobbyists. There is also an argument for the use of the fighting manuals as works that can shed some light on ideas besides how to kill a man. As a contrast to Meyer's "healthy" nationalism the xenophobia of the Englishman George Silver is addressed to offer a frame of reference. Despite his defensive and insulting tone, Silver offers a reasoned argument and some perhaps logical conclusions, but his identification of historical precedent is quite flawed. Identifications of what he believes are inherently English elements of their fighting style are in fact rather new constructs. These were brought about by an edict of Queen Elizabeth some years previous to his writing of *Paradoxes of Defense* in 1599.⁶

Whether we know it or not, humans will fight for something they cannot see, yet believe in and hold as important as air and sustenance. Such is how many a fighting man has viewed his country. Fighting for the group, whether family or friends, is possibly the earliest form of self-sacrifice. Self-sacrifice is not exactly the most rational thing for someone to do. So it stands to reason that self-sacrifice for the good of something rather amorphous like a nation would be the beyond reason, yet the conflicts of the past few centuries have largely been driven by the notion of nationalism. As Koppel S. Pinson put it, "Nationalism as a movement as well as a political philosophy depends to a large degree on sentiment and emotional stimulation than on any appeal to reason or to a rationally constructed system."⁷ Combat for a cause is something particular to the human condition. We have fought for food, territory, money, and a myriad of other such

⁶ George Silver, "Paradoxes of Defense," The Raymond J. Lord Collection of Historical Combat Treatises and Fencing Manuals, <http://www.umass.edu/renaissance/lord> (accessed October 2010).

⁷ Koppel S. Pinson, *Pietism as a Factor in the Rise of German Nationalism* (New York: Octagon Books, 1968), 33.

reasons. The cause may be in connection with one of those more basic attributes that someone like Karl Marx would identify such as economics.

The rationalization of fighting in Western European culture has largely revolved around the defense and promotion of Christianity. Secondly, the same activities were conducted in the name of particular groups that evolved into what we now recognize as nations. The sentiment of promotion of those groups is what we now call “Nationalism”. When fighting is taught in a society, there is inevitably an element of reasoning to why the fighting is necessary. Usually it revolves around the defense of “us” against “them”. Such a concept is easy to instill since humans are social animals and rather readily can rationalize group security whether there is a real threat or not.

Throughout this work I hope to show the reader that the writers of these fighting manuals of the sixteenth century were literate, thoughtful, educated, and complicated men who had more nuanced reasons for fighting than for profit or the sheer thrill of it. They had higher aspirations and held themselves to a higher degree of moral character than their fellow man. How well they lived up to such morals is not for us to judge but to appreciate that they recognized a path for it.

CHAPTER 2

MEYER'S NATIONALISM

In this chapter I set the context in which Joachim Meyer existed and wrote the treatise that is the central element of this work and connect his system with that of Johannes Liechtenauer in the later fourteenth century. The story of any modern country's nationalism is a twisted and complicated story, but Germany's is even more convoluted and difficult to pin down than most. One reason is that the term "German" can mean "Germanic" as in the tribes of that language group, "German" as in people from the tribes that were recognized by Tacitus, "German" as in the people from the localities within the boundaries of the Kingdom of Germany as set up by Charlemagne, and "German" as in the citizens of modern Germany. Despite numerous references to "Germany", "Germans", and the "Fatherland", what Meyer means with these nationalistic terms is a bit ambiguous. He never feels the need to define these terms because they are not the central element of his work. He is writing about fighting after all, not defining what it is to be German. Yet as the reader will see in the analysis of Meyer's writing, his degree of passion, the values he enumerated, and his view of things not German offers significant evidence for the nature of his nationalism. Information about the man is scant and buried in archives in Strasbourg, France; Basel and Scherwin, Germany.

Since nationalism is so often the product of larger movements, the effort must be made to illustrate Meyer's context. This chapter partially serves as a synopsis of a few relevant events where comparisons to Meyer's rhetoric can be made that specifically deal with German nationalist zeal or reasons why it was not stronger than it might have otherwise been. Several

brief examples have been included to illustrate certain views that survive to modern times. An attempt to define nationalism is also in order, but being a problematic term the focus will rest entirely with fitting the rhetoric of Meyer and others mentioned within the nationalist typology put forth by Dekker, Malová, and Hoogendoorn.⁸

Meyer's Germany

Joachim Meyer was born in Basel in 1535. Being born after the early events of the Reformation he probably knew little of what Germany had been like before that great upheaval. Germany was already known for its political disunity even before Martin Luther threw gas on the fire. Throughout Meyer's life Germany was increasingly torn apart by the conflicts of the Reformation. Ulrich von Hutten's Knights Revolt of 1522-23 along with the Peasants Revolt of 1525-26, had made the Reformation not only an ecclesiastical reform movement, but an outright secular rebellion by opposing the political capacity of the Roman Catholic Church as it affected civil government that only subsided with the Peace of Augsburg in 1555.

Such a time of conflict and confusion tends to lead people to yearn for a time when their lives were either simpler or they were in a more powerful position. This sort of time is usually referred to as the "glory days" or "good ol' days" even into modern times. As Michael Hughes points out, "Revolutionary and reactionary sentiments were often mixed: a social, political and religious revolution was envisaged, a violent overturning of society portrayed as the gateway to a

⁸ Henk Dekker, Darina Malova, and Sander Hoogendoorn, "Nationalism and Its Explanations,"

new Golden Age.”⁹ More often than not these days either did not exist or were not nearly as good as they are made out to be.

Until about 1500 trade along the Rhine, Danube, and Elbe rivers, along with its many good roads, kept Germany central in European economics and politics. According to Michael Hughes the discovery of the Americas with new sources of wealth and shifting of emphasis on Atlantic travel made Germany increasingly irrelevant. The Germans of the mid to late sixteenth century must have felt a great deal of despair. Not only was their country torn apart by religious differences that were manifested in the governments of the cities taking sides and dragging them along with them, but their economy was not what it had been just a short time earlier. The Holy Roman Empire had been in a period of decline since the previous century anyway, but the shift of trade away from central Europe was one of the critical factors. Hughes also points out that another significant factor was the natural migration of herring shoals into the North Sea.¹⁰

This despair was acted out in the emergence of millenarianism, “Turkish attacks on Europe were viewed as part of a pattern of divine punishment for men’s sins...The times seemed “out of joint” and there was a real fear of imminent catastrophe.”¹¹ Despite the imperial reform efforts of Maximilian Germany remained fairly disjointed. The intellectual and physical conflicts of the Reformation would exacerbate this disunity; however, a German spirit lived on especially in the person of Martin Luther.

By the time Joachim Meyer reached maturity and wrote his fighting manuals Germany had actually had time to return to some degree of peace following the more violent conflicts of

⁹ Michael Hughes, *Early Modern Germany: 1477-1806* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 11.

¹⁰ Hughes, *Early Modern Germany*, 11.

¹¹ Hughes, *Early Modern Germany*, 10.

the Reformation. Religion was still the source of strife elsewhere in Europe, particularly in France and England. But since Germany had lost its economic preeminence to the farther western countries it enjoyed a sort of benign neglect. This time of relative peace would be shattered by the Thirty Years War, but for the moment there was peace. According to Hughes this time of peace is often neglected by historians because very little seems to have happened as far as significant events.¹² It is in this small relative vacuum of German history that Meyer learned his trade, taught students, wrote his works, and died heavily in debt from funding his most famous treatise.

This time of relative peace is largely due to the personalities of the Holy Roman Emperors following Charles V. His brother Ferdinand I was still Catholic but was “more German and more *politique* than his brother.”¹³ Ferdinand sought talks between Protestants and Catholics through the Regensburg diet in 1556-57 and a meeting at Worms in 1557. He also invited the Jesuits into Germany with Maximilian II setting them up with their own universities in Vienna and Graz. Maximilian II was more aligned with Protestantism but retained the political astuteness of Ferdinand in playing both sides and trying to get each to make concessions. “He saw toleration as the only means of avoiding the destruction of the *Reich*.”¹⁴

Apart from his two known martial arts works, the only records directly dealing with Meyer during his life are his marriage in 1560 in Strassburg and his numerous petitions to the Strassburg city council to permit a *fechtschule*. His 1560 marriage to Appolonia Ruhlman conferred upon him the status of Burgher.¹⁵ Meyer is thought to have been born around 1537 in

¹² Hughes, *Early Modern Germany*, 61.

¹³ Hughes, *Early Modern Germany*, 62.

¹⁴ Hughes, *Early Modern Germany*, 63.

¹⁵ Christopher Van Slambrouck, "The Life and Work of Joachim Meyer" *Meyer Frei Fechter Guild*, http://freifechter.com/joachim_meyer.cfm (accessed December 19, 2010).

Basel. Meyer states that he travelled extensively in learning the arts that he would later write about and has also taught numerous illustrious persons,

Then since, gracious prince and lord, I have thought and intended to show my due service to the common fatherland in this, with such little talent as the Almighty has graciously allotted to me; and, to speak without vainglory, I have not only learned the praiseworthy knightly art of combat from skilled and famous masters, but have also now practiced it for many years, and have instructed young princes, counts, lords, and nobles in it, and was graciously and kindly requested by your kind princely grace on many occasions to write up this praiseworthy art of combat...¹⁶

He continues, “Almighty, brought together that which I have learned and experienced with care and work in this praiseworthy and sophisticated art over many years...”¹⁷ Because he published the work himself he became indebted 1300 crowns which he promised to pay back by Christmas of 1571. In Strassburg Meyer had been trying to sell his book for 30 florins. He took a position in Schwerin at the court of the Duke of Mecklenburg’s court as *fechtmeister*. He received his pay up front and left Strassburg early in January 1571, arriving at court on 10 February. Two weeks later Meyer died of what must have been pneumonia since he had been travelling in the dead of winter some five hundred miles.¹⁸

The fact that he was requesting to hold a *fechtschule* indicates that he was a recognized master-at-arms. Meyer petitioned the Strassburg City Council for a *fechtschule* in 1561, 1563, 1566, 1567, and 1568.¹⁹ Meyer identified himself as a *Freifechter* which placed him outside of the usual guild system of recognizing such masters. His positioning of himself in Strasbourg and not identifying himself as a member of the dominant fighting guild of the time, the *Marxbrüder*,

¹⁶ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 38.

¹⁷ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 38.

¹⁸ Van Slambrouck, "The Life and Work of Joachim Meyer". All of the particular events of Meyer’s life related here are from the Van Slambrouck article.

¹⁹ Van Slambrouck, "The Life and Work of Joachim Meyer"

mark him as a Protestant, most likely a Lutheran. Had Meyer been a Catholic he would have identified saints in his writings and had no reason not to be a member of the *Marxbrüder*. At the time the *Marxbrüder* was the only fighting guild recognized by the emperor. Their Protestant equivalent the *Federfecters* would only emerge the year that Meyer published *Kunst des Fechtens* in 1570, and would not achieve Imperial recognition until 1607. Meyer may have been a member of the *Federfecters* considering he died as the *fechtmeister* to the Duke of Mecklenburg who was a noted patron of that guild.²⁰

Strasbourg was one of what are known as the “free-cities”. They operated as city-states with the city council able to decide on issues such as the holding of festivals, permitting of guild activities, what religion would be practiced, whether other religions would be tolerated, and even going so far as to conduct their own foreign policy since there was no mutual agreement between the cities to act in each others’ defense across the empire. Strasbourg was a Lutheran town.

Guilds during Meyer’s time functioned as regulators of the labor force. Members of the fighting guilds not only studied the martial arts, they trained others. A trained *skoller* of the longsword from one of the guilds established by the Emperor was known as a *dopplesoldier*, meaning that he would receive twice the pay of a normal soldier. The power to grant such rankings was the source of the importance of the guilds insofar as why they would have a student base. A master could only be recognized by one of the guilds, and only a master could request a *fechtschule*. Holding a *fechtschule* was tantamount to holding a day-long advertisement for your teaching services and establishing your credibility through the public performance of yourself and your students.

²⁰ Kevin Mauer, e-mail message to author, February 1, 2011.

It is unclear whether Meyer was ever granted a *fechtschule*. His not being a guild member should have hindered him, but being that the only recognized guild at the time was notoriously Catholic must have stunted their power reach into Strassburg. Meyer's renown would come later. His book became a hit and his wife would be involved in its republishing in 1600.²¹ Several other masters would mention him in their works including Heinrich von Gunterrodt and Giuseppe Morsicato Pallavicini.²² Jakob Suter and Theodor Verolinus would borrow heavily from Meyer.²³

Defining the Nationalism of Meyer

The prevailing idea regarding modern nationalism is that it is a product of the nineteenth century. Perhaps in the modern sense this is true based on the emergence of what is considered the balance of power in Europe when the academic study of the phenomenon began in earnest at the turn of the twentieth century and accelerated after World War I in an attempt to understand that conflict and perhaps avoid another World War. But the establishment of the systems of government that were the major protagonists in World War I largely took place in the eighteenth century, and the first references to those countries by their modern names began much earlier. Indeed, Tacitus recognizes certain tribes as Germans in the first century.²⁴ It is unclear whether they considered themselves German.

The common conception of modern nationalism is that it emerged in the nineteenth and to a lesser extent the eighteenth centuries. Louis Snyder perhaps more accurately identifies the

²¹ Van Slambrouck, "The Life and Work of Joachim Meyer"

²² Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 12-13. Meyer is the only German mentioned in Pallavicini's work.

²³ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 12.

²⁴ Caius Cornelius Tacitus, *Germany and the Agricola* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1897).

modern movement when he says, “The root of later German national consciousness was expressed in this Prusso-German symbiosis which gave German nationalism its form and content.”²⁵ World War I is commonly referred to as the embodiment of all that nationalism leads to and is seen as the biggest reason to move more towards a form of internationalism as was illustrated by Carlton Hayes and worked towards in the formation of the League of Nations.²⁶ Contrary to many of his contemporaries, Hayes admits that there was a form of nationalism at work in the sixteenth century. Hayes also addresses instances of patriotism which go farther in evangelizing the virtues of a nationality than mere national identity, but he sees these as the exception.²⁷

Meyer’s situation as a fighting man who both fought and taught others to fight makes him particularly curious when it comes to philosophical ideas. Even if Joachim Meyer’s *Kunst des Fechten* is exceptional in its praise of the German people, it does raise some interesting questions and observations about nationalistic thought especially in the late sixteenth century, and particularly in the Holy Roman Empire. It is the fighter who takes the weight of responsibility on his back to defend or expand whatever entity for which he is fighting. Granted, many were forced to do so throughout history, but the fact remains that any political unit lived or died because people put themselves in dangerous situations for it. Those who did so willfully, even enthusiastically, must have some good reasons for doing so.

The Dekker, Malová, and Hoogendoorn study “Nationalism and Its Explanations” is used to categorize Meyer’s nationalist sentiments since it offers a graded view of the phenomenon in contrast to the categorical approach. Using this approach judgment as to the intensity of

²⁵Louis L. Snyder, *Roots of German Nationalism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), viii.

²⁶ Carlton J.H. Hayes, *The Historical Evolution of Modern Nationalism* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1968), 6.

²⁷ Hayes, *The Historical Evolution of Modern Nationalism*, 6.

nationalistic sentiment can be assessed. In their 2003 study, Dekker, Malová, and Hoogendoorn put forth a typology of nationalism centered on the individual's feelings of belonging, pride, and favorability. They divided these "nationalisms" into six levels from neutral to intense in nationalistic tendencies:

- 1) National feeling: Feeling of belonging to one's own people and country.
- 2) National liking: Liking one's own people and country.
- 3) National pride: Being proud of one's people and country.
- 4) National preference: Preferring one's people and country over others.
- 5) National superiority: Feeling one's people and country are superior to others.
- 6) Nationalism: Feeling a sense of belonging to a particular "nation" with a common origin, wanting to keep that "nation" as pure as possible, and desiring to establish and/or maintain a separate and independent state for that particular "nation".²⁸

Using their typology Meyer's work might reflect "national preference". Meyer was more than simply proud of his country since he goes to great lengths to make the connection of Germans as the cultural descendants of the Greeks and Romans as well as pointing out the great deeds of those from whom he is attempting to cull favor. A designation of "national superiority" might have a case, but Meyer does not go as far as someone like George Silver in his indictment of the fighting methods or weapons of another people. Indeed, Meyer actually encourages the study of others' weapons. Whether he means for this study to be purely for the education of his readers so that they expand their own repertoire or to be better prepared to meet and defeat foreigners on the battlefield is debatable and addressed in my analysis of Meyer's rapier section of the 1570 work.

²⁸ Henk Dekker, Darina Malova, and Sander Hoogendoorn, "Nationalism and Its Explanations," 347.

Meyer certainly does not go as far as George Silver in blatantly advocating one's own tradition's weapons and approach over others'. Meyer does not appear to be concerned with one of Silver's chief complaints, which is that rapier fighting tends to produce a significant amount of what can best be described as double-kills. Silver says things like, "The second mark is, that neither the Italian nor any of their best scholars do never fight, but they are most commonly sore hurt, or one or both of them slain."²⁹ Silver's indictment of the Italians is that they do not care about the preservation of their youth because they send them out into the world with a weapon that can get them hurt just as well as it can hurt someone else. He also states that it is useless in war and thus of no use whatsoever.³⁰

But could Meyer be writing about a completely different weapon? Although he is addressing the use of the "*rappier*", he includes the use of a number of cuts. Indeed, his system seems to mimic the Lichtenauer idea of cuts becoming thrusts and thrusts becoming cuts. The appearance of the weapon in that section looks very different from what the modern notion of the rapier is, namely the inclusion of a compound hilt. Meyer's rapier is of very similar cruciform construction as his longsword, but with a grip only long enough for one hand. Granted, the sword pictured in the woodcuts is most likely the training hall version just like the *federschwert* in the longsword section, but Meyer goes to great lengths to point out that his teachings throughout his book are useful in both *skoolfechten* and *kriegfechten*, meaning fighting in both the school and in war. The current amateur pursuit of reconstructing Meyer's teachings largely supports this supposition.

²⁹ Silver, *Paradoxes of Defense*, 5.

³⁰ Silver, *Paradoxes of Defense*, 5.

It is very likely that Meyer's *rappier* could more accurately be classified as Bolognese side-sword. Not only does Meyer address cuts with his *rappier*, but Silver states that the rapier cannot cut. Perhaps the problem here comes down to either modern mislabeling or differing historical languages. The name "rapier" comes from one of the Latin words for kill, *rapio*. Most sword texts simply call their weapons "swords". The sixteenth century was a time of transition between longswords and rapiers as the predominant civilian defense weapon. During this time another Italian tradition known as Bolognese side-sword arose. The side-sword was a less robust version of the cruciform single-hand sword but often had compound hilts like later rapiers. Meyer states that he had travelled extensively to learn the fighting arts. From Strasbourg he very easily could have travelled to northern Italy or have encountered an Italian master travelling north.

This willingness to introduce a foreign weapon and to have stated that it was learned from foreigners indicates that Meyer was more concerned with learning the fighting arts than with making his art "pure" for lack of a better term. This idea of purity is at odds with a classification of Meyer's rhetoric as full nationalism using the levels typology of Dekker, Malová, and Hoogendoorn. Also, Meyer never goes so far as to advocate for or against any political entity save for the flattery of whomever he is hoping to gain some form of commission for his work. But this is not to say that Meyer is merely mercenary in his promotion of Germanic values. The values that he is advocating are also not simply the concurrent values of what can be considered German with those that can be considered Chivalry. Tacitus points out how the Germanic tribes had a certain sense of honor that others whom the Romans had encountered did not. He specifically addresses honesty and the marriage contract. Romans were rather notorious for infidelity, and marriage was seen more as a simple business arrangement for the clarification

of lineage and flow of property ownership upon death. Wives were considered bound by the pledge, but not men. Tacitus observed that married German men would not pursue other women.

So why would Meyer wish to connect the German people with the Romans as their cultural descendants? Just as with the modern notion of the 1950s as the United States' "Golden Age" western Europeans, particularly Germans, of the late sixteenth century sought to reawaken a better time. The Romans, for all their faults, were seen as the most civilizing force that Europe had seen. They were also considered the best fighters since they had largely defeated the tribes that would become the Germans. In keeping with the apparently diametric chivalric ideals of civility and warlike nature the Romans were an obvious choice. The popes may have had their own agenda of gaining power of a centralized temporal authority throughout Europe, but the people yearned for an end to constant fighting.

The notion of the Germans as inheritors of Roman civilization plays to a particularly romantic view of German identity. In the nineteenth century, Wilhelm and Jakob Grimm contributed their academic prowess to the romantic element of the nationalist movement with the publication of their *Fairy Tales*. Hans Kohn identified Jakob Grimm as, "...one of the most violent Pan-Germans, expressed his confidence that the peace and salvation of the whole continent will rest upon Germany's strength and freedom."³¹ Meyer had a rather romantic view of the German character as well. Meyer's connection of the training of arms with the implantation of the German character into the youth is evident when he writes, "Moreover no proof is needed that it was the custom with our ancestors and the ancient Germans to raise their youth in knightly practice along with other good arts, since this is self-evident from what they

³¹ Snyder, *Roots of German Nationalism*, 39.

achieved.”³² The very romantic notion of chivalry is introduced by Meyer in his identification of the Germans as “knightly” as he continues the previous observation with, “For once the Romans thought they had conquered the entire world, as an overconfident nation they devoted themselves to sensualities more than to good arts, policy, and knightly practices, and through this the entire empire was undermined, attacked on every side, and torn apart by enemies; and the knightly Germans were appointed and advanced before all peoples to save it, take it over, and erect it again.”³³ Here Meyer identifies the practice of arms as being one of the elements lost by the Romans that led to their fall. It is the Germans who have been handed the mantle of the Roman Empire and charged with recreating it because of their fighting spirit as well as aptitude with arms. Meyer’s connection of a certain German character with righteous skill at arms is comparable to the Grimm brothers motivation for finding a certain “national genius” as Snyder puts it, “Like the Romantics the Grimms issued a plea for the claims of the imagination, of emotion and feeling, of individualism, and above all for a synthetic expression of the national genius in all its manifold aspects of literature, art, religion, and philosophy.”³⁴

Chivalry was largely a non-nationalist construct that sought some control of violence. But instead of a control that simply limited the duration of fighting like the feast day prohibitions of the Church chivalry actually sought more to limit the severity of the fighting on those who were largely the object of the fighting, the peasant class. The peasant class was the labor force. They might have owned some land, but it was their working all the workable land that produced the goods that made the landowners their money. It would not be advantageous for a conquering force to murder the peasant class en masse as they would need them since they were after the

³² Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 38.

³³ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 38.

³⁴ Snyder, *Roots of German Nationalism*, 40.

land to make money in the first place and that land needed to be worked. This particular tenet of not inflicting undue harm on the innocent did not necessarily have to be applied to those who might be considered “others”, particularly non-Christians, and especially Muslims. The massacre at Acre was no simple suspense of chivalry. It just simply did not apply. The whole point of taking the city was to rid the land of the Muslims, so what we might consider to be a non-chivalrous act must be carried out.

The German view of themselves as having a superior values system as identified by Meyer is evident in Frederick Kempe’s exchange with his father regarding the conduct and industriousness of the German prisoners his father (a natural born German) guarded during WWII in Wyoming. Kempe is relating a story about a handmade cigarette lighter, ““He made it from spent bullet casings that he’d melted down,” said my father. “Few American soldiers could ever produce something this perfect with nothing but a few crude tools. The POWs there were mainly from the Afrika Korps. Rommel’s group. They were healthy and of the highest morals. Better than the Americans.” “Better?” “Better as men.””³⁵ Despite this example being modern it offers a glimpse of German moral superiority not dependent on the hate or fear of others, but in the specific pride in the character of themselves as a people. Kempe’s father’s nationalism for Germany remained intact even though he had been living in the United States for some time. His patriotism for his adopted country was sufficient for him to accept being enlisted in its Army, but he would not stoop to commit what he viewed as immoral acts against those he still regarded as his countrymen.³⁶ Such a situation illustrates a nationalism of the mind that is not dependent on political entities. Kempe’s father saw it as a moral issue just as Meyer saw the degradation of

³⁵ Frederick Kempe, *Father/land: A Personal Search for the New Germany* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1999), 6-7.

³⁶ Kempe, *Father/land*, 6.

the training of arms as a threat to the moral education of young Germans. Also, Meyer's sense of nationalism parallels the father's in that he was not averse to what the rest of the world had to offer and Germany's greatness was not dependent on the exclusion of others but in the maintenance of high moral standards. Tacitus identified as much several centuries earlier as an outsider.

Meyer felt that there was something that needed to be fixed in his Germany. His book is addressed as being for the instruction of the youth, "Therefore this book may be of some use and benefit to these people, and particularly young lords and others of the nobility to whom this knightly art especially pertains and who should learn it."³⁷ He states that the study of the longsword was beginning to be neglected, "And I have no doubt that if this art had been written and published before our time in comprehensible good order, then not only would the noble art not have so declined with many people, but also many abuses would have entirely been avoided, which today have become quite common."³⁸ He worried that the ideals of what can be construed as chivalry were going to be lost along with the practice of arms since those lessons of honor and manliness were most readily attached to training for war. With war becoming increasingly reliant on the invention of new types of weaponry instead of skill at arms Meyer must have felt the training of the martial arts slipping away from his culture. Meyer's equating chivalric values with German values is meant to lend dignity to the German people, make the youth take up the practice of the arts he teaches, raise the Germans above "others" as the inheritors of the Roman legacy of civilization, and to flatter the leaders who he thought would buy his book.

³⁷ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 41.

³⁸ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 41.

Meyer's identification of "German values" is quite at odds with John Armstrong's observation on group identity in *Nations Before Nationalism* where he states, "Anthropological historians have been increasingly obliged to confront the fact, implicit in [Fredrik] Barth's approach, that groups tend to define themselves not by reference to their own characteristics but by exclusion, that is, by comparison to "strangers."³⁹ Meyer never identifies the Germans as being within a particular geographical area, but he goes to great lengths to identify certain qualities. But these qualities are inherent in any fighting person regardless of region. Meyer must be offering these observations as a sort of inspirational address to the German people. His only inclusion of anyone as particularly not German is in explaining the difference in the use of the thrust between the Germans and the Italians. The rapier must have been highly problematic for Meyer to promote within Germany because of the German prohibition on thrusting. As you will see in the analysis of his treatment of the rapier, he gave it a particularly German flavor by his use of terms familiar to Germans not just because of the language but by their connection to the system of Johannes Lichtenauer.

The obvious elements that Meyer writes about that have nationalistic rings to the words are his introductions to different sections of *Kunst des Fechtens* and especially in the dedicatory preface. These instances offer not only the best evidence for his group identification, but his application of values to that group identity, the values applied to the execution of the techniques, and his translation of the rapier into a decidedly German format indicate that he felt that Germans as a people were more than a geographically defined group but were culturally identifiable and distinct. Although the Germans were culturally distinct, if we take Meyer's word for it, their political environment was anything but. According to Hughes this was a time

³⁹ John Armstrong, *Nations Before Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 5.

of comparative peace in Germany being between the Peace of Augsburg and the Thirty Years War, but disunity was the practical experience.⁴⁰ Although they are the writings of one man, Meyer illustrates a yearning for German unity at a time when small regions were able to operate with such a high degree of autonomy that conducting any activity on what can be construed as a national scale was virtually impossible, but fall short of the militancy of Von Hutten and do not allude to any wish for a political embodiment of Germany apart from the good examples set by those he flatters.

Despite assertions that what might be construed as nationalism in Joachim Meyer's time can be more accurately defined as tribal or racialism, he routinely makes mention of political organization even up to the imperial level. Here, Meyer specifically refers to the "fatherland" and for combatants to conduct themselves in an honorable manner for the service of their "native country".

Observe, if you will learn to fight artfully,
you should attend to these verses with diligence.
A combatant shall conduct himself properly,
not be a boaster, gamer, or toper,
and also not swear or blaspheme,
and shall not be ashamed to learn.
Godfearing, modest, also calm,
especially on the day when he shall fight;
be temperate, show honor to the old,
and also to womenfolk. Attend furthermore:
all virtue, honor, and manliness,
you shall cultivate at all times,
so that you can serve with honor
emperor, king, prince, and lord,
and also be useful to the fatherland,
and not a disgrace to your native country.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Hughes, *Early Modern Germany*, 61.

⁴¹ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 89. Jeffery Forgeng cross references this passage with very similar lines in the Döbringer Fechtbuch that is the earliest written record of Liechtenauer's verses. However, the section ends with, "so Joachim Meyer admonishes you" instead of Liechtenauer.

In this passage taken from the longsword section, Meyer's addressing of German values must be assumed since he does not specifically say "Germans". Being that he addresses Germans directly quite a bit elsewhere, this is a safe assumption.

A modern analysis of Meyer's language would lead one to believe that the identifications of "fatherland" and "country" were afterthoughts and not as important as the feudal allegiances stated previous to them. Alternatively, such a choice in list order can indicate an emphasis on the final mark; in this case "the fatherland...your native country." Since Meyer lumps them all together this should lead us to the conclusion that at the very least they were equally important. Even their being equally important is a march towards nationalistic ideas from the medieval chivalrous idea of service to one's lord first and foremost. But Meyer was not in the employ of Johann Casimir, the Duke of Bavaria, to whom he addressed in the dedicatory preface. He saw him as the embodiment of the values and skillset that he hoped to advance in the German youth. Casimir was still a fairly young man and his father was still alive thus holding the title of elector Palatine. Either Meyer was simply attempting to flatter him in the hopes of getting some sort of support, or he genuinely sought to advance his ideas of the reestablishment of German knightly values amongst the youth and Casimir was his choice as the proper vehicle for such a movement.

As Meyer does frequently, he is advocating a certain moral code to his fellow Germans. Tacitus points to the tribes that would become the Germans as being the embodiment of "virtue, honor, and manliness" which the Germans perceived as specifically German values especially as it relates to the honoring of the marriage contract.⁴² Meyer is condoning these virtues and practices for the preservation of German honor. This passage fits the template of the German as stoic and reserved because of confidence and a certain upbringing, not because of any ethnic

⁴² Tacitus, *Germany and the Agricola*, 38-40.

superiority ideas. Almost thirty years later George Silver will cross into hyper English nationalism in his 1599 *Paradoxes of Defense*. Meyer is tame by comparison and can even be seen as a bit of an internationalist because of his offering of instruction in the rapier without the grumbling about the popularity of the weapon that permeates Silver's work. Both writers saw it as their duty to save their countries through appealing to the youth to follow the traditional ways.

Connecting Meyer and Liechtenauer Through the Longsword

Meyer's teachings fall within what is considered the Liechtenauer tradition. He is addressing the youth of Germany in the hopes that they would lead lives more suited to what Meyer saw as "German values", he wishes to save the training of the longsword which he sees as on the wane along with those before-mentioned German values. He uses the common tactic of the time of establishing the Germans as the cultural descendants of the Romans. He is not as xenophobic in his nationalism as reformers of the warrior class such as Ulrich Von Hutten (who will be addressed later) were. Finally, he Germanizes the rapier in a way that draws it into the Liechtenauer tradition. These points are evident both in his direct quotes as in his introductions and dedicatory preface, in the nuances of how he talks about foreign weapons and ways, and how he organizes and explains the material. The only writings available from him are two manuals (1560 and 1570) and his requests for *fechtschules* to the Strasbourg city council.⁴³ Any analysis of his work here follows his published 1570 manual *A Thorough Description of the Free*

⁴³ *Fechtschules* were publically held events that were a combination of public showcase for the hosting master to show off the skills of himself and his students and an opportunity to bring renowned instructors in for seminars. These had to be approved by city councils and were formally opened by mayors in flamboyant ceremonies.

Knighly and Noble Art of Combat with All Customary Weapons, Adorned and Presented with Many Fine and Useful Illustrations as translated by Jeffery Forgeng.⁴⁴

Meyer's admonition of the German youth to practice the attributes of clean living, honor, and manliness is not new to the *fechtbuchs*. Johannes Liechtenauer advocated the same practices in the fourteenth century. Indeed, the idea of chivalry is based on honor, manliness, and service to God and temporal lord. But Lichtenauer never addresses Germans exclusively. Lichtenauer coming from a medieval tradition was not necessarily concerned with national identity and likely had no real concept of it. The best admonition to the youth from Liechtenauer is this passage from Hango Dobringer, "Young knights learn to love God and honor women that your honour may grow. Practice knightly things and learn arts that help you and grant you honour in war."⁴⁵ The Roman Catholic Church exercised a level of control over the area rivaled only by the original template of that control, the Roman Empire. Chivalry might have started out as a set of rules within the warrior class determining the rules for membership, but well before Lichtenauer's time it had become the mechanism for the church to control the warrior class and with the addition of elements of salvation was the driving force in recruitment for the Crusades.⁴⁶ Whether this control was truly effective or not is debatable, but they at least paid it lip-service following the Crusades. Most of the restrictions placed on the chivalric class by the church as far as when things like dueling were allowed had at least fallen out of practice and would be almost entirely abandoned by the time of the Counter-Reformation. Meyer is asserting those attributes that chivalry was originally supposed to champion that formed the underpinning of the feudal system. Loyalty to lord and honor of action were elements of the chivalric ideal that were

⁴⁴ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*.

⁴⁵ Hango Dobringer, "Cod.HS.3227a." *Hango Dobringer fechtbuch from 1389*, trans. David Lindholm, 18R.

⁴⁶ By this I mean the necessary attributes a person was supposed to possess to be a member of that class.

supposed to make the warrior class self-regulated as far as the level of violence they imposed on the countryside. The Church took over that regulation and made it so restrictive that the code became untenable, thus irrelevant. Works such as the *Codex Wallerstein* even endorse the robbery of the very people that the reader was supposed to protect⁴⁷.

The central element, or at least the most overt, of German sentiment in Meyer's 1570 work is in the Dedicatory Preface⁴⁸. In these three pages Meyer references the "Fatherland" three times, "Germans" nine times, and makes the connection between the Germans and the Romans as if the Germans are the power descendants of the Romans twice.⁴⁹ Meyer's national preference, despite there being no unified Germany, is evident in his referencing Germans and even using the "Fatherland" term that is so reminiscent of the German nationalist rhetoric of more modern movements?

His use of the word "nation", as Jeffrey Forgeng translates it, suggests that Meyer conceives of being German as a cultural identity, not necessarily as a racial identity. Such a cultural identity would have what modern anthropologists and social-historians term as racial overtones, but such is the nature of descent. When calling on the memories of one's forefathers it is unavoidable that they will be of the same race as the intended audience. There is no element of malice towards others that would define any of Meyer's work as racial since it is the knightly virtues that Meyer is espousing. Those knightly virtues can just as easily be lost to the Germans as exhibited by others.

⁴⁷ Grzegorz Żabiński and Bartłomiej Walczak, *Codex Wallerstein: A Medieval Fighting Book from the Fifteenth Century on the Longsword, Falchion, Dagger, and Wrestling* (Boulder: Paladin Press, 2002).

⁴⁸ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 37-39.

⁴⁹ The Dedicatory Preface is three pages as of Dr. Forgeng's published translation.

Here Meyer uses the phrase “our German nation” which is central to illustrating his ideas regarding his own national identity. In this passage Meyer is paying homage to the Duke of Bavaria, Johann Casimir, whom he hopes to obtain patronage from in order to get his work published.

Firstly, it is evident that our German nation has every reason to have a reassuring confidence in your princely grace as a particularly courageous prince, for your princely grace has already in young years shown and demonstrated himself to be manly, princely, and great-minded, in the late arduous French expedition, concerning which I can make extensive report from the account of reputable people.⁵⁰

He is also identifying the attributes of physical courage and manliness as if they are particularly important to German character. If they are, then a leader like Casimir must demonstrate them as Meyer identifies that the Duke has.

Meyer’s treatment of the longsword and how well it relates to Liechtenauer provides the groundwork for understanding the system that Meyer translated to the rapier and is vital to illustrating how Meyer Germanized the rapier. Before we can delve into the particularities of German identity contained in weapons besides the longsword some illustration of what the Liechtenauer tradition entails is essential since all German treatise (even Meyer) quote his verses with very little alteration for two hundred years.⁵¹ There is no known document that is attributed directly to Liechtenauer. The earliest reference to him is the 1389 manuscript of the priest Hänko Döbringer who wrote down the verse epitomes that Liechtenauer taught his students so that they might remember his teachings.

⁵⁰ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 39.

⁵¹ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 14.

Meyer's *Kunst des Fechtens* is considered part of what is called the Liechtenauer tradition. Johannes Liechtenauer was a Swabian fencing master who taught his students to remember a set of verse epitomes to remember his teachings. Although he instructed them that the art was secret they began to write it down starting with the priest Hänko Döbringer in 1389. These earliest manuscripts contained no images. Because of the lack of images and our modern lack of exposure to sword training, it is difficult to determine exactly what the verses mean. By the early fifteenth century manuscripts were being produced with images attached such as the Gladiatoria manuscript and the works of Hans Talhoffer.⁵²

Liechtenauer's system is largely based on the use of the *meisterhäw* (master cuts). These are the *zornhaw* (wrath cut), *krumphaw* (crooked cut), *zwerchhaw* (thwart cut), *schielhaw* (squinting cut), and *scheitelhaw* (scalp cut). However, Liechtenauer includes instruction on several other techniques independent of those contained in each master cut section. There is a set of four guards known as the *Vier Leger* (Four Guards) and the *Vier Versetzen* (Four Deflections). The deflections are a way to use the master cuts to defeat the guards but since a defender will move out of a given guard to defend himself there are follow-on techniques to maintain the advantage. Each of the *meisterhäw* contains anywhere from two to seven individual exchanges that can be taken as lessons sometimes known as devices or plays. Independent of the *meisterhäw* are ten additional techniques: *nachreisen* (chasing), *überlaufen* (overrunning), *absetzen* (setting off), *durchwechselln* (changing through), *zucken* (pulling), *durchlaufen* (running through), *abschneiden* (slicing off), *hendtrucken* (pressing hands), *hengen* (hanging), and *winden* (winding).⁵³ Meyer uses each of these lessons in his teachings with very few modifications. His use of this system firmly establishes him as a product of the Liechtenauer

⁵² Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 14.

⁵³ Hänko Döbringer, "Cod.HS.3227a." *Hänko Döbringer fechtbuch from 1389*, trans. David Lindholm.

tradition which is regarded as being the basis for the German system.⁵⁴ As Jeffery Forgeng states in his introduction to the Meyer translation, “The Liechtenauer tradition is easily recognizable by its characteristic repertoire of techniques, couched in a consistent and distinctive vocabulary.”⁵⁵

Meyer begins with his usual statement that the training of weapons for combat should be attached to a certain department, in this case “knightly and manly”. He also states that the longsword holds an important place as being the basis for the understanding of all other weapons.

Since I have undertaken to describe most diligently and truly the art of fighting with those knightly and manly weapons that nowadays are most used by us Germans, according to my best understanding and ability; and since experience shows and it is obvious that combat with the sword is not only an origin and source of all other combat, but it is also the most artful and manliest above all other weapons; therefore I have thought it necessary and good to begin with this weapon, and to discuss it very briefly but clearly in such a manner as is done with all other arts and practices:⁵⁶

Despite what Meyer says here about being brief, he is never brief. His longsword section is sixty-eight pages long and he regularly repeats himself.

The first instance of a direct parallel between Meyer’s introduction to the longsword and Liechtenauer’s is the addressing of a false sort of fighting known as “sword-mummery”. Today we might think of it in terms of stage combat which seeks to create tension or move a story along through flashy movement that must be modified from any sort of real fight to make them visible to an audience. Meyer addresses it with, “For there is a very big difference between such mummery and real combat, and indeed the knightly art of combat has always been held in great

⁵⁴ Sydney Anglo, *The Martial Arts of Renaissance Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 23.

⁵⁵ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 14.

⁵⁶ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 49.

esteem by all widely experienced soldiers, especially the Romans, while street-mummers are taken for the most worthless and useless folk in the world.”⁵⁷ Here we see yet another connection of the training of weapons for combat and the Romans. Meyer asserts that it is only right that the modern combatant, whether German or not but probably German, should look down upon the sword-mummers because the Romans did. Döbringer’s recording of Liechtenauer regarding the same issue is,

For in this righteous fencing do not make wide or ungainly parries or fence in large movements by which people restrict themselves. Many Masters of play fighting [*Leychmeistre*] say that they themselves have thought out a new art of fencing that they improve from day to day. But I would like to see one who could think up a fencing move or a strike which does not come from Liechtenauer’s art. Often they want to alter or give a new name to a technique, all out of their own heads and think up wide reaching fencing and parries and often make two or three strikes when one would be enough or stepping through and thrust, and for this they receive praise from the ignorant. With their bad parries and wide fencing they try to look dangerous with wide long strikes that are slow and with these they perform strikes that miss and create openings in themselves.⁵⁸

So Meyer begins his work in the same manner as the “founder” of the German tradition of longsword fencing by dealing with the same problem affecting modern martial artists. If they are both addressing these theatrical combatants, then they must have seen them as particularly dangerous to the preservation of effective fighting techniques.

Meyer does a much better job of organization than most of the Liechtenauer specific manuals do, especially the Döbringer manuscript. Whereas Döbringer recounts the verse without subdivision in what sometimes appears as a meandering explanation of combat, Meyer partitions it into chapters and sub-headings. Indeed it is quite easy to refer to an element of Meyer’s

⁵⁷ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 49.

⁵⁸ Hako Döbringer, "Cod.HS.3227a." *Hako Döbringer fechtbuch from 1389*, trans. David Lindholm, 14R.

manual that might take quite a while to find in Döbinger. But what Döbinger set down was meant to be memorized, so quick reference would be as fast as the student's memory.

Before addressing any particulars of technique both Lichtenauer and Meyer discuss the physical description of the sword and how the opponent is to be divided in order to discuss targeted openings and origins of attacks. They do the same thing as far as naming the pommel, grip, cross-guard, and then the divisions of the blade into the strong and the weak, and the long and short edges.⁵⁹ Regarding the strong and weak Meyer says, "The forte [strong] of the sword is the part from the quillons [cross-guard] or haft to the middle of the blade, the foible [weak] from the middle to the point..."⁶⁰ Regarding long and short edges Meyer says, "The long edge is the full edge facing from the fingers straight out toward your opponent. The short or half edge is the part that faces toward the thumb or between the thumb and index finger toward the combatant himself..."⁶¹

The division of the combatant is very simply put as dividing him into quarters in both Liechtenauer and Meyer. Meyer goes to farther lengths to describe this despite the luxury of being able to include diagrams that Döbinger did not bother with for Liechtenauer's verse. "Now the combatant is divided into four quarters or parts: the upper and lower, and each into the right and left. I do not need to describe more extensively what these things are, since the very act of looking shows a person what the upper and lower, and right and left parts are. Yet for the

⁵⁹ Regarding Dr. Forgg's translation of cross-guard into "quillons" I must take issue. Although quillons can indeed refer to the arms of the cross-guard in later period compound hilts, Meyer's text uses the word *Creutz*, meaning "Cross" which would have been perfectly acceptable. Bracketed insertions of Cross along with Quillons are my own addition.

⁶⁰Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 52.

⁶¹Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 52.

better understanding of what I mean by these, see the figure on the right in the previous image [A].”⁶²

Meyer deviates from Liechtenauer in the application of what is called the *segno*. The *segno* is a set of lines centered on the combatant’s heart that form a circle at the level of the hands and feet much like the Vitruvian Man drawing by Leonardo daVinci. There are eight lines running vertically, horizontally, and diagonally. The vertical and horizontal lines divide the combatant into four quarters identified as the openings. In this description Meyer stays consistent with Liechtenauer. Meyer takes the diagram a step further by creating a cutting diagram that resembles the Greek Orthodox crucifix. He offers a vertical line from the head to between the legs, a horizontal line at the eyes, and another horizontal line just below the level of the shoulders.⁶³ Meyer turns the traditional view of the *segno* into a squared diagram and attaches letters to the lines so that the student has a guide to follow while practicing cuts. Liechtenauer advocated a similar diagram but did not mention placing a graphic representation on a wall. Meyer includes Liechtenauer’s cutting exercise in the longsword section and his own diagram in the dussack section.⁶⁴ Liechtenauer’s cutting exercise only addresses diagonal cuts, whereas Meyer’s includes the vertical and horizontal.

Meyer then instructs the reader about the guards [*huten*] used with the longsword. The terms used for these guards are exactly the same as Liechtenauer and will be used with very little alteration in every other weapon that Meyer addresses. This repeated use of terms speaks to the unified nature of combat that the fechtbuch writers recognized. Meyer has additional guards but they are all variations on the main four that Liechtenauer teaches. The Liechtenauer guards are

⁶² Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 51.

⁶³ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 111. Figure on the right in image A.

⁶⁴ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 166 for dussack, 72 for longsword.

Ochs (Ox), *Pflug* (Plow), *Vom Tag* (Day or Roof), and *Alber* (Fool).⁶⁵ The 1410 manual of Fiore includes nearly as many guards as Meyer, and they are also fairly similar to Liechtenauer's but they do not appear in the later rapier manuals in the same way that Meyer applied Liechtenauer's guards to that weapon as will be shown later.⁶⁶

Meyer's other guards are the *Zornhut* (Wrath Guard), *Langort* (Longpoint), *Wechsel* (Change), *Nebenhut* (Side Guard), *Eisenport* (Irongate), *Schrankhut* (Crossed Guard), *Hangetort* (Hanging Point), *Schlüssel* (Key), and *Einhorn* (Unicorn). Many of these guards will be recycled in the dussack and rapier material. *Eisenport* in particular has some interesting differences between weapons while maintaining the same name and it is also found in the Italian manuals of Fiore. The *Zornhut* also offers a rather interesting situation since a very similar guard is found in the Italian manuals. It is known as *Posta di Donna* (Woman's Guard) in Fiore.⁶⁷

In writing about the cuts Meyer addresses one of the key components in Liechtenauer's system, the *meisterhaw*. The *meisterhaw* (master cuts) are five cuts identified by Liechtenauer and explained by Meyer as being,

not that whoever who can correctly execute them should at once be called a master of this art, but rather because they are the root of all true artful techniques that a master ought to know; and he who can execute and use them properly should be considered a skilled combatant, since all master techniques are hidden in them and one cannot do without them. These are the Wrath [*Zornhauw*], Crooked [*Krumphauw*], Thwart [*Zwerchhauw*], Squinting [*Schielhauw*], and Scalp [*Schaytlehauw*].^{68 69}

⁶⁵ Döbringer, "Cod.HS.3227a." trans. David Lindholm, 32R.

⁶⁶ Fiore dei Liberi, *Fior de Battaglia*, 22R- 22V.

⁶⁷ Fiore dei Liberi, *Fior de Battaglia*, 22R. The upper figures.

⁶⁸ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 56.

⁶⁹ Döbringer, "Cod.HS.3227a." trans. David Lindholm, 23R.

Other cuts listed by Meyer include the High Cut [*Oberhauw*], Middle [*Mittel*], Low Cut [*Underhauw*], Short Cut [*Kurtzhauw*], Clashing Cut [*Glützhauw*], Rebound Cut [*Prellhauw*], Blind Cut [*Blendthauw*], Winding Cut [*Windthauw*], Crown Cut [*Kronhauw*], Wrist Cut [*Kniechelhauw*], Plunge Cut [*Sturtzhauw*], Change Cut [*Wechselhauw*], and Flick [*Schneller*].⁷⁰ These additional cuts with the exception of the High, Middle, and Low Cuts are as much a set of techniques as they are particular ways of cutting. Arguably, the master-cuts are the same way since texts like that of Sigmund Ringeck's attribute a certain set of techniques to each master cut and use them as a way to order their texts.⁷¹ But the master-cuts are meant as 'first-strike' methods, whereas the others are only offered as being upon the presentation of certain situations or following certain techniques.

Liechtenauer and Meyer mention the *meisterhauw* opposing certain guards in a concept known as the *Versetzen* (displacements). As Döbringer relates, "There are four displacements [*versetzen*] that also hurt the guards seriously."⁷² Using the strikes of the *versetzen* against their assigned guard is meant to provide the attacker with both an open target and offer more options for follow-on attack than the defender should be able to muster given the correct attack was made but not necessarily successful. Meyer states that the *versetzen* are the second element of combat with the strikes being the first. "Since combat is based on two chief elements, that is first on the cuts with which you seek to overcome your opponent, the secondly on parrying, which is how you may bear off the cuts that your opponent directs at you and make them weak and unforceful..."⁷³ Meyer offers a warning on how to conduct parries that goes against the concept of the parry/riposte exchange seen in modern sport fencing as seen here, "The first is when you

⁷⁰ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 57-59.

⁷¹ David Lindholm and Peter Svärd, *Sigmund Ringeck's Knightly Art of the Longsword* (Boulder: Paladin Press, 2003).

⁷² Döbringer, "Cod.HS.3227a." trans. David Lindholm, 32V.

⁷³ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 60.

parry without any particular advantage in the common fashion only out of fear, in which you do nothing but catch the strokes that come from your opponent by holding your weapon against him, and you do not seek to injure him, but are content to get away from him without injury.”⁷⁴ Meyer identifies that Liechtenauer warned against it as well when he states, “Guard yourself from parrying; if need befalls you, it will cause you trouble.”⁷⁵ After warning the reader how not to conduct parries he states that there are two ways to perform parries correctly, “The first is when you first put off your opponent’s stroke or send it away with a cut, and then rush at his body with a cut, having taken his defence. The second way to parry is when you parry your opponent and hit him at the same time with a single stroke, which the combat masters of old especially praise as suitable.”⁷⁶ The first manner is use of what are known as “devices” which are exchanges between combatants meant as lessons or examples of a situation in which a particular technique is used. All parrying done in this first manner require a follow-on strike which might allow the opponent a response, thus it is identified as double-timed action. The second manner is known as single-timed action which is at the heart of the Lichtenauer system that forms the core of what is considered the German tradition. If your defense and attack are contained in the same stroke, the opponent will be hit and his weapon will be blocked or deflected with your own.

Meyer very clearly applies the German tradition of the master-cuts as set down by Liechtenauer in his treatment of the rapier, thus Germanizing it as you will see later. Obviously, such a way of fighting would be much safer than merely striking and fending off strikes.

⁷⁴ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 60.

⁷⁵ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 60.

⁷⁶ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 61.

Combining attack and defense also lends itself to much shorter fights. This particular way of approaching a fight is not mentioned in the Italian rapier texts predating Meyer.

Meyer identifies the elements of combat as being the cuts and the parries, but the parts of combat are more about the ranges involved, namely the Onset [zufechten], the handwork [handtarbeit], and the withdrawal [abzug]. Contained in the same section as the material on parrying and the *versetzen* in Meyer is what is known as the handwork [*Handtarbeit*]. Meyer identifies twenty-eight different techniques in the handwork, often with multiple explanations of each. Going into each technique would be pointless, but it must be noted that items such as *fülen* (feeling), *nachreisen* (chasing), *schneiden* (slicing), *umbschlagen* (striking around), *absetzen* (setting off), *zucken* (pulling), *fehlen* (failing), *abschneiden* (slicing off), *sperren* (barring), and *einlauffen* (running in) will be seen again in the rapier material. Elements such as *fülen*, *nachreisen*, and *absetzen* are also very important elements as explained in the Liechtenauer verse.⁷⁷

As you can see, Meyer uses not only the same terminology as Liechtenauer, but his principles as far as the use of the meisterhaw, the *versetzen*, and relating the possible options in a given situation in the devices are very much the same. All known German manuals since the late fourteenth century followed this same set of vocabulary and the techniques were fairly similar. Meyer differs from the other manuals in that he is much more verbose in explaining all aspects, and he is much more successful at dividing the teachings into sections for a more organized style.

⁷⁷ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 61-67.

In this chapter the context of Meyer's life and work was established with a necessarily short synopsis of his life considering there is as yet little in the way of documentation apart from his writings, a template was proposed to gauge his nationalist sentiments, and his 1570 work was clearly connected to longstanding German longsword tradition attributed the Johannes Liechtenauer. Meyer's nationalism has such an optimistic ring to it that it stands in contrast to the bleak picture of Germany in the late sixteenth century painted by Hughes. He sought to reawaken a sense of German pride in the youth and clean up the image of martial arts study by connecting German identity with the proud, upright Romans. His connection with Liechtenauer solidifies the training of fighting with the longsword as an old tradition of German martial arts that harkened back to what he perceived as a "Golden Age" for Germany.

CHAPTER 3

THE LIMITS OF MEYER'S NATIONALISM

Despite his intense pride in German values and encouragement of the youth and the young Duke of Bavaria to uphold the hope of the German people, Meyer was not without an appreciation for foreign weapons. He studied the *rappier* from some Italian masters but did not teach it in the manner of Italian manuals such as that of Achille Marozzo. His style appears similar, but he transfers the vocabulary and basic principles of Liechtenauer's system to the use of the *rappier*. In doing so he effectively Germanized the *rappier* to the point that unless someone had prior knowledge that the weapon was not of German origin he might actually think it was yet another weapon in the Liechtenauer arsenal.

Select Dusack and Rappier Passages from *Kunst des Fechtens* 1570

The second section of *Kunst des Fechten* teaches about the dusack which is a training weapon for the particularly German messer which is a one-handed, single-edged sword whose textual sources exist nowhere but from Germany.

Now that I have laid the groundwork with sword combat, next comes the dusack, which takes its basis from the sword, as the true source of all combat that is carried out both with one and two hands. Since it is, after the sword, not only the weapon most used by us Germans, but also an origin and basis of all weapons that are used with one hand, I will here present it and then discuss and

explain it in orderly fashion with all its particulars and techniques.⁷⁸

It appears only in German produced manuals, thus making it apparently a singularly German weapon just as Meyer states.

Interestingly, Meyer names one of the guards in the dusack section the same as one from the quintessential Italian fighting manual produced by Fiore dei Lieberri in 1410, thus making the first connection with Meyer's lack of fear of the outsider. Meyer's Boar Guard [*Eber*]⁷⁹ is strikingly similar to Fiore's but on the opposite side. Fiore's Boar's Tooth places the longsword on the left hip with the point towards the ground thus with the blade aligned parallel to the right leg.⁸⁰ Meyer's Boar Guard has the dusack held at the right hip with the point towards the ground, thus also aligning the blade with the leg, but this time the left. Such a find suggests a certain pan-European nature to the organization of their martial arts but is not enough to be evidence of the dusack being merely stolen from the Italians or vice versa. Granted, a single guard position should not also be evidence of pan-Europeanism. However, Boar's Tooth is not a guard normally presented in the German tradition, and Meyer is using the same animal name for it. Later on, Meyer's identification of the dusack as the "basis of all weapons that are used with one hand" will become very important as it relates to the rapier.

If the inclusion of an Italian inspired guard in the dusack section is not enough, Meyer takes an almost internationalist tone in the introduction to the rapier section. Contrary to George Silver twenty-nine years later, Meyer acknowledges the usefulness of the rapier and also acknowledges how the training of it is problematic for Germans based on the German abolition of thrusting.

⁷⁸ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 121.

⁷⁹ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 156 and 171.

⁸⁰ Fiore dei Liberi, *Fior de Battaglia*, 24R.

As regards rapier combat, which at the present time is a very necessary and useful practice, there is no doubt that it is a newly discovered practice with the Germans and brought to us from other people. For although the thrust was permitted by our forefathers in earnest cases against the common enemy, yet not only did they not permit it in sporting practice, but they would also in no way allow it for their sworn-in soldiers or others who had come into conflict with each other, except against the common enemy, a custom that should still be observed today by honorable soldiers and by civilian Germans. Therefore rapier combat would be superfluous, were it not that thrusting, as well as many other customs that were unknown to the Germans of former times, take root with us through interaction with foreign peoples. And since such foreign customs increase with us from day to day in many places, it has now also become more necessary not only that such customs of alien and foreign nations should be familiar and known to us, but that we should practice and adapt ourselves to these customs no less than they, as much as should be useful for needful defence, so that when necessary, we can encounter them to protect ourselves that much more better and be able to triumph.⁸¹

Even though I said “internationalist”, it is apparent from the quotation that Meyer was advocating the study of such a weapon, and others perhaps, so that an enemy using such could be defeated.

Meyer also introduces the idea of the common enemy. It is not clear who this common enemy is or who are the parties in communion. It could be that with the fragmented nature of the German lands during Meyer’s time it is the German people who might have the “common enemy”. Such an idea does work insofar as that groups of Germans did fight together against outside invaders, but they also frequently fought each other. Perhaps he does not necessarily mean a German sort of communion but just the allies of the reader. Or it might be that he is referring to the “common enemy” of Christendom, the Muslims. Although the Muslims were indeed a threat at the time, tensions between Protestants, Catholics, and Calvinists were much more of a pressing concern. Of course, Muslims never used the rapier.

⁸¹ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 173.

Meyer's acknowledgement of the rapier as a useful weapon to learn might run counter to the conclusion that Meyer's 1570 manual is a nationalistic document. After all, Meyer admits that it is not of German origin and that he learned it from foreigners and thus not in what might be a German manner. However, the manner in which Meyer says the combat is laid out harkens to Lichtenauer's teaching about cuts becoming thrusts and thrusts becoming cuts in a very fluid style centered on actions known as binding and winding. Meyer states that there are four elements to combat with the rapier that he will explain in the first part of this section on the rapier. The third element is, "Next how one shall transform the cuts into thrusts, the thrusts into cuts."⁸² Italian rapier manuals generally do not refer to cuts.

Meyer seeks to make all the weapons as similar as possible in their employment. Meyer sees the longsword as the foundational weapon to his teachings and states that such is the case with the Germans in general when he says, "...it is obvious that combat with the [long]sword is not only an origin and source of all combat, but it is also the most artful and manliest above all other weapons..."⁸³ Cross comparisons of different weapon systems easily yield equivalency in at least the guards employed. Brian Hunt, who has done extensive work on the earliest European fighting manual, MS I.33, noted nearly equivalent postures in the seven guards of that manuscript with those of the Lichtenauer tradition of which Meyer is part.⁸⁴

The names of the guards Meyer employs in the rapier section support the view that he did not necessarily alter the style but altered the presentation of the teachings to fit the German

⁸² Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 173.

⁸³ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 49.

⁸⁴ Brian Hunt, "A Comparative Pictorial Study of the Wards and Techniques of the late 13th century Sword & Buckler Manuscript I.33, or Tower Fechtbuch," *The Association for Renaissance Martial Arts*, <http://www.thearma.org/Manuals/I33-guards.html> (accessed January 20, 2011).

tradition. The quintessential rapier manual is the work of the Italian Camillo Agrippa from 1553. In Agrippa's manual he names the guards based on the position of the hilt in a circular plane from the perspective of the fencer. The guards are simply the Italian ordinal [or cardinal] numbers (prima, secunda, terza, quarta) Agrippa's guards are actually a simplification of Achille Marozzo's eleven guards. But Meyer employs guard names and weapon positions more in line with his Lichtenauerian tradition. He names them *Oberhut* (High Guard), *Ochs* (Ox), *Underhut* (Low Guard), *Eisenport* (Irongate), *Pflug* (Plow), and *Langort* (Longpoint).⁸⁵ In his longsword section he explains his guards and then states that each can be done on the left and the right with short explanations of how they would differ. In the rapier section he partitions this description out so that a description of a guard such as the High Guard is explained separately, just as Marozzo and the other Italians do with naming the guard something completely different.

Eisenport (Irongate) is particularly interesting as it is found in the Italian longsword manuals as a completely different position. Yet its use offers some evidence for a tempering of Meyer's teachings being solely German inspired. As Meyer describes it, and illustrates, it is effectively the guard *prima* from Marozzo's manual. In Fiore's Irongate (or Iron door more accurately) the sword is actually pointed down reminiscent of the Lichtenauer *Alber* (Fool's) guard. Meyer's rapier *Eisenport* is directly comparable to the same guard in the longsword section, emphasizing the interchangeability that he has created between the two weapons. In the rapier section he describes *Eisenport* thus, "For this, position yourself thus: stand with your right foot forward as always, hold your weapon with your arm extended down and forward before your right knee, so that the point extends forward up against the opponent's face..."⁸⁶ In the longsword section he describes it thus, "...stand with your right foot forward, and hold your

⁸⁵ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 176.

⁸⁶ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 176.

sword with the hilt in front of your knee with straight hanging arms, so that your point extends up toward your opponent's face. Thus you have your sword in front of you for protection like an iron door; for when you stand with your feet wide, so that your body is low, you can put off all cuts and thrusts from this position.”⁸⁷

Since thrusting had been prohibited in the German schools, the *Eisenport* guard had fallen into disuse, yet he still includes it and even has devices for it in the longsword material. He also states that the guard will be more fully explained in the rapier section. “You will find the true Irongate presented more fully later in the treatise on rapier combat. For since thrusting with the sword is abolished among us Germans, this guard has also entirely fallen into disuse and been lost; however these days the Italians and other nations use it.”⁸⁸ In this single sentence Meyer is both identifying his audience as specifically German and making the case that it should be studied and something valuable can be learned from foreigners that the Germans have lost because of their thrusting prohibition.

Ochs is also easily transferrable from the longsword section which closely mirrors the Liechtenauer verses. In explaining it he seems to suggest that *Oberhut* (High Guard) and *Ochs* are different initially, but then tells the reader that they are essentially the same. “Position yourself for it thus: stand with your right foot forward, hold your hilt by your right side, extended forward, up, and out to the side, as shown by the large figure on the right in Image B, such that your point or tip stands against the opponent's face. This is also called the Ox, because in this

⁸⁷ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 54.

⁸⁸ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 177.

guard you threaten a thrust from above with you weapon, for the Ox is essentially just the position for a thrust from above.”⁸⁹

Pflug (Plow) is rather curious in that it is very similar to *Eisenport* (Irongate) in the rapier section, but appears to more accurately resemble *Eisenport* in the longsword section. “The Plow is essentially just a Low Thrust, but as a posture. Use it thus: stand with your right foot forward as before, hold your weapon down before your right knee with the quillons horizontal, such that in holding the weapon your thumb extends over the quillons onto the flat of the blade; this flat shall stand turned up toward you, the other one down away from you toward the ground.”⁹⁰ In the longsword section *Eisenport* is a very deep stance with the quillons held horizontal, yet in the rapier section it is *Pflug* which is held with the quillons horizontal.

In chapter four Meyer addresses the cuts which indicate that the sword being used was not merely capable of deadly effect with the thrust as in what is usually thought of with the word rapier. He names them with nearly the same names as the cuts in the longsword section, once again reaffirming the German nature of his explanation if not his system. He uses two of the names of the Master Cuts, namely the *Schedelhauw* (Scalp Cut) and *Schielhauw* (Squinting Cut).⁹¹

Meyer displays the Lichtenauer tactic of thrusts becoming cuts and cuts becoming thrusts in chapter six, the title of which “A Good Lesson and Precept on How One Shall Transform the Cuts into Thrusts, the Thrusts into Cuts” pretty much says it all.⁹² Throughout this section Meyer illustrates the use of the concept of acting *indes* (at the same time as, or in the instant) to

⁸⁹ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 175.

⁹⁰ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 177.

⁹¹ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 177.

⁹² Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 186.

one's opponent in order to exploit an opening by using *fulen* (feeling). In order to turn our thrusts into cuts Meyer instructs us to, "Send a powerful High Thrust against your opponent's face, and halfway through, when you see that he goes up to parry, then just as your thrust should hit, rapidly pull your hilt a little bit up and cut through sideways beside or under his hilt."⁹³ Here Meyer sticks with his tactic of reversing direction once the committal to a defensive action is made. When he says "just as" he is referring to *Indes*.

Performing actions at the instant that your opponent does something is central to all of the manuals in the Lichtenauer tradition of which Meyer is a part, although a very late one. In the early fifteenth century Sigmund Ringeck made additional comments to the verse of Lichtenauer in the hopes of making them more understandable to someone who had not received personal instruction from Lichtenauer or one of his disciples since by that time they were either dead or would be very soon. Ringeck's series of devices are divided into sections using the mastercuts as a basis for organization. The devices are a series of "if he does X, do Y" sort of lessons. Lichtenauer added special emphasis to *Indes* in his verse, "'Before' and 'after' are the foundations of the art, 'weak' and 'strong' 'simultaneously' note that word. So you will learn to skillfully work."⁹⁴ Simultaneously is one translation of *Indes*.

The fact that he is referring to previous weapons is further evidence that he has found a way to explain this foreign weapon in a way that would be familiar to Germans. Meyer refers the reader back to previous sections when he addresses using "deceiving" in the attack but only as it pertains to the weapon. "I consider it unnecessary to discuss deception with the weapon at length, since I have already spoken of it often in the two previous weapons: namely, deceiving is

⁹³ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 187.

⁹⁴ Lindholm and Svärd, *Sigmund Ringeck's Knightly Art of the Longsword*, 21.

when I send in my stroke at an opening, and then see that he goes against it to parry it, so that this cut becomes useless to me, so I let it run past without hitting, and quickly pull it in the same motion to the nearest opening elsewhere.”⁹⁵ Meyer likes to repeat his previous lessons when he makes the slightest reference to something he has previously explained. To someone simply reading his text this might seem unnecessary repetition, but to someone who has had experience teaching it will be all too familiar. This tendency suggests that Meyer had considerable teaching experience.

Another tactic of the Lichtenauer tradition (one that Meyer takes to an extreme) which Meyer translates to the rapier is the threatening of one area to provoke a reaction which opens another. This is more of the “deceiving” with the weapon that he said previously he would not go to great lengths to explain because it had been dealt with in the previous two weapons. “In sum, if you wish to hit the opponent above, then first glance or threaten below, or if you will hit him on the left, then threaten him first against his right, so that he must slip after with his weapon, and thus give you space on the other side, as will be taught more extensively in the devices.”⁹⁶

When Meyer addresses the deceiving with body language he does so with this almost comical device:

When you find an opponent in the Low Guard on the right, then position yourself in the Irongate, and act as if you intended to thrust earnestly at his face. For this, raise your right foot and stare hard at his face, and thus with your arm and hand vigorously pressed forward, and with sneering nose and upraised foot, send the point at his face, as if you intended earnestly to thrust. And as you thrust in, turn your long edge up toward your left; unnerve him thus with the thrust so that he precipitously goes up to parry it.

⁹⁵ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 187.

⁹⁶ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 188.

Then let your thrust travel around your head as he goes up, and cut outside at his right thigh, with a broad step forward and your body leaning; be on guard quickly with Defence Strokes to protect you.⁹⁷

In this single device, which Meyer intends as an illustration of deceiving, we can see his renaming of a guard he learned from an Italian source, the application of an Italian guard name normally meant as something else (Irongate), acting *Indes*, turning a thrust into a cut, and attacking one side with the intention of immediately following it up with an attack to the opposite side.

Meyer's Germanizing of the rapier is evident in how he explains parrying using the names of techniques used in the longsword section and originating with Liechtenauer. Meyer's parrying is not terribly different from even the most iconic of Italian rapier treatises, that of Ridolfo Capo Ferro. Capo Ferro's parrying could be construed as double-timed actions, but they still retain the principle of keeping the point on line with the opponent, closing the line of his attack and maintaining contact with his blade as your point is driven into him. Such an action maintains the bind and uses the *fulen* (feeling) that all texts of the Liechtenauer tradition advocate. But Capo Ferro and Marozzo illustrate the movement by describing transitioning between particular guards. Meyer often includes such instructions in his descriptions, but has specific names for the actions such as *absetzen* (setting off), *abschneiden* (slicing off), *dempffen* (suppressing), *durchgehn* (going through), *verhengen* (hanging), and *sperrren* (barring).⁹⁸

All of these actions are addressed in the longsword section in virtually the same manner they are intended in the Italian tradition from which Meyer is drawing. *Absetzen* in particular is done in virtually the same manner. From the rapier section Meyer describes it as, "...go forward

⁹⁷ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 188.

⁹⁸ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 190-191.

with extended weapon up into the Longpoint, and catch his incoming thrust or cut on your long edge; and when you catch his cut, then meanwhile thrust in with the Longpoint.”⁹⁹ In the longsword section he describes it as, “...go up with the long edge against his stroke and step the same time with your right foot toward his left and set him off; then at the moment it clashes, turn the short edge and flick it at his head.”¹⁰⁰ The key to this technique is the turning of the long edge to set the opponent off of the line of attack which he is attempting to establish on the side opposite to that where the sword is located. Meyer does show some difference in the two weapons with how the technique is concluded, but he would not advocate a thrust into longpoint with the longsword since thrusting had been abolished in the German schools but was still allowed in the Italian and French where the rapier was more popular.

The lesson on *abschneiden* is not nearly as instructive of a lesson as in the rapier section, but it does speak to Meyer’s predilection toward allowing the student to discover their own style. He addresses *abschneiden* in the longsword section as, “...if your opponent cuts at you with long cuts, then slice them off from you with the long edge to both sides, until you see your opportunity to come to another work more suitable for you.”¹⁰¹ But once again the similarity between the weapons exists as we see with his description of *abschneiden* with the rapier, “...as soon as your opponent pulls up his hand to cut or thrust at you; then raise your weapon at the same time, and extend your hand and weapon from your right against his left; as you extend, drop your hilt to the level of your knee, or even lower if possible, so that your blade stands with the point somewhat up and forward; catch his blade on your long edge, and send it in the manner

⁹⁹ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 190.

¹⁰⁰ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 63.

¹⁰¹ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 66.

of a slice down before you toward your left.”¹⁰² It is unclear sometimes why Meyer provides better descriptions of techniques in the rapier section being that it is a weapon to which he would have been far less familiar. In any case the similarity of the technique can be seen in that the defense of strikes is done by intercepting the incoming strike with the long edge, most likely cutting into the flat of the blade, and setting it off with a slicing motion that allows the defender to attack either directly in a single-timed action or as a quick follow-up in a double-timed action.

The technique of *sperren* (barring) is also addressed for both weapons. For the rapier Meyer describes it as, “...when you stand in the Irongate, then drop the point of your blade toward the ground, stretched straight out before your lower leg, and slip a bit sideways by stepping out from his cut toward his right, barring his blade so that he cannot come through.”¹⁰³ Contrary to his description of *abschneiden*, Meyer states that, “You will find barring described more fully in the treatise on the sword.” Strangely enough, the longsword section comes before the rapier making it necessary to not only wait for a more thorough explanation, but to have to refer back to a previous section. Such a necessity speaks to the integrated nature of sword combat that Meyer advocates and speaks to how similar combat with the rapier is to that with the longsword, at least in how Meyer teaches it. Referring to the longsword section, *sperren* is described as, “...fall forcefully with your long edge on his blade, and as soon as it clashes or touches, then cross your hands and bar him so that he cannot come out.”¹⁰⁴ Both descriptions are rather sparse, but this technique is not exactly one of the central elements of Meyer being that it is entirely defensive with not instruction on counter-attack.

¹⁰² Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 190.

¹⁰³ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 191.

¹⁰⁴ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 67.

Chapter eight of the rapier addresses the elements of *wechseln* (changing), *nachreisen* (chasing), *bleiben* (remaining), *föhlen* (feeling), *zucken* (pulling), and *winden* (winding), all of which are contained in the longsword section at greater length than in the rapier once again speaking to the integration of techniques between the two weapons and Meyer's application of German terms to the rapier. *Wechseln*, or *durchwechseln* (changing through) is described as being done in two ways, but it still amounts to changing the side of the opponent's weapon yours is on whether by winding or disengaging by pulling back. The first way is described as, "...pull and send your cut through under his blade, and thrust at him on the other side."¹⁰⁵ The second way as, "...pull your blade through underneath his, toward the other side."¹⁰⁶ *Durchwechseln* is addressed in the longsword as, "...before he brings his technique halfway through, you shall also change through against him, to the other side which he opens with this shortening. Thus you force him to parry, so that he must let the Before (*Vor*) pass to you."¹⁰⁷ Meyer's descriptions of *durchwechseln* are exactly the same for the two very different weapons. In speaking about the *Vor* he is reminding the reader about the Lichtenauer concept of attacking first, making the opponent react to you, and if the opponent attacks first to use given techniques to reclaim what amounts to the initiative in an exchange.

Nachreisen (Chasing) is addressed in both rapier and longsword with the illustration for the rapier being, "If your opponent holds his weapon down to his right, then wait for him to go away from there, and when he sends his weapon away, thrust quickly in at the same place."¹⁰⁸ He offers an additional observation late in the longsword portion with, "Chasing is diverse and manifold, and should be executed with great judiciousness against combatants who fight

¹⁰⁵ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 192.

¹⁰⁶ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 192.

¹⁰⁷ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 99.

¹⁰⁸ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 192.

inexpertly swinging around with long cuts.”¹⁰⁹ He continues, “Thus let him miss, and as you step through, while his sword is still falling toward the ground with the cut, cut artfully and quickly in from above at his head, before he recovers or comes back up.”¹¹⁰ *Nachreisen* is applied to both weapons with the only real difference between the two being that cuts are instructed with the longsword while thrusts are indicated in the rapier owing to both the strengths of each weapon as well as the rules of the German schools regarding no thrusting.

Fühlen gets very little treatment by itself but is contained in nearly every device that Meyer offers being that the act of feeling the movements of the opponent in order to discern his intentions and next actions is vital to the instruction to act *Indes* to either dispatch the opponent or regain the initiative. In Chapter eight of the rapier Meyer’s instruction on *fühlen* is, “Thus ‘feeling’ is to test and discover how and when he will go away from your bind, so that you can at once pursue him confidently, as is also said in the section on the sword.” Interestingly, Meyer never actually addresses *fühlen* in the longsword section in the sense that it gets its own header or independent explanation. However, every device and lesson offered contains instruction to execute a technique “as soon as” the opponent conducts a particular action. *Fühlen* must be implied since such a reaction would be impossible without feeling that the opponent is conducting that action.

For *bleiben* (remaining) and *zucken* (pulling) Meyer refers the reader back to the longsword section thus reinforcing the integrated nature of his concept of combat without even offering that there might be the least difference in how each is used with the rapier. “Remaining and pulling you have also been taught previously in the section on the sword.”¹¹¹ In these two

¹⁰⁹ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 104.

¹¹⁰ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 104.

¹¹¹ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 193.

concepts Meyer offers a rare bit of succinctness. *Winden* (winding) has been discussed at length in the longsword section, but Meyer decides that it is worth yet another example. He offers the following explanation of why he includes the additional *winden* lesson, “I have written about all this only as a memorandum for you, on which you shall diligently reflect, so that later in the section on devices when one of them should be presented, you can understand and see it that much more quickly, and also may that much more quickly grasp the devices.”¹¹²

Throughout “The Second Part of Combat with the Rapier” Meyer does not use the German names with the specificity that he did in the earlier part of the rapier. However, since he uses the same organizational method as the longsword, we should not discount this as abandoning the German way of organization. This section is a collection of lessons that he terms “devices”. The use of such lessons is consistent with his treatment of the other weapons as well. He divides the devices by the guard from which they begin. This organization is common in the Lichtenauer tradition especially in the lessons that are grouped under the master-cuts as seen in the comments on Lichtenauer’s verse by Sigmund Ringeck. He is still addressing fighting as being from the guards he enumerated earlier. He occasionally even offers new terms such as *abwechseln* (changing off) and *gerade versatzung* (straight parrying). But he is usually concerned with offering examples of what can be done in certain situations when a particular guard is taken.

Curiously, even though Meyer, as part of the Lichtenauer tradition, admonishes the student to attack first so as to take the *Vor* in a fight his devices deal with actions in reaction to the opponent. This might seem as if he is abandoning such a principle; however, the real lesson in these devices is the re-establishment of the *Vor* when the opponent has taken such an

¹¹² Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 193.

advantage away from you. Here Meyer has included some instruction on stepping that he indicated earlier would be contained in later lessons, “Position yourself as you have been taught in the High Guard of the right Ox, and approach him thus. If he thrusts forward at your face, then turn the long edge out of the High Guard against his blade, extending your arms into the Longpoint; and meanwhile as you thus set him off, then at the same time also step out sideways from his blade with your left foot behind your right, and thrust on his blade in before you at his face or chest.”¹¹³

The sub-headings of this section can almost be taken for the lessons in and of themselves, but Meyer manages to go into even greater depth than his longwinded headings. Take for example this device titled “How you shall catch his thrusts and cuts from his left, and before he recovers, quickly counterthrust against his right.”¹¹⁴ Yes, it does seem to be enough of an instruction, but Meyer is not done:

Now if he cuts or thrusts from the other side (that is from his left) at your right side, also diagonally from above, then again turn your long edge and hilt with extended arm against his incoming blade to parry or catch it; as you thus extend your hilt to parry against his weapon, then at the same time step out sideways from his blade with your left foot toward his right. Then as soon as his blade clashes on yours in this parrying, pull your hilt back out behind you above your right shoulder to gather for a powerful thrust; thrust straight at his face on his right side, with a step forward on your right foot, so that at the end of this thrust you again stand with your weapon extended in the high Longpoint. After this thrust, be diligent to turn away his cuts and thrusts from this parrying, until you have an opening.¹¹⁵

After dealing with a myriad of situations that can arise while holding each of the guards instructed for the rapier, Meyer addresses fighting with a dagger or cloak in the non-weapon

¹¹³ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 194.

¹¹⁴ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 195.

¹¹⁵ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 195.

hand which had not been addressed in German manuals with the exception of several dealing with the sword and buckler. After reading so much minutiae about how and when to turn what edge where while standing in whatever given guard the reader is suddenly confronted with this strange passage:

Summary: as regards the dagger in conjunction with the rapier, I advise the German that he accustom himself to parry with both weapons together, and meanwhile take heed whether he can harm his opponent with the weapon or dagger, yet such that he does not bring his weapons too far from one another, to make sure that he can always come to help the one with the other. For experience has shown that when a German has accustomed himself to parry only with the dagger, then it has sometimes led to harm in serious combat, since it is contrary to their character and nature—for in this case, the nearer one remains to nature with one's custom, the more one will accomplish.¹¹⁶

With the exception of the introduction of the rapier section, Meyer has largely not specifically addressed Germans. The identification of Germanic elements has hinged entirely on the use of guards and techniques identifiable as being of the Lichtenauer tradition that forms the backbone of what might be considered the German school of swordsmanship. But here he is now addressing Germans specifically twice. In the first instance, "...I advise the German...", he is making the reference as a specific address meaning that his intended audience is specifically German. If he meant a wider distribution he would have said the "fighter" or the "combatant" perhaps so that any translation would not have such specificity.

The second use of "German" is much more curious. Here he is speaking of the same specific address as in the previous use of the word, but this time he also includes something about German nature. On the surface this can seem to be merely about not being well practiced with the weapon, which is true. However, remember that this weapon, and especially this

¹¹⁶ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 223.

weapon combination, is rather foreign to the German schools. They have not used it because it is not only not among their traditional weapons (which does not really count for much), but the strength of the weapon violates their rule of not thrusting in training. Therefore they would not train with it on a large scale. When Meyer says that “it is contrary to their character and nature” he can either mean that they just are not used to it or it goes against something that is inherently German.

Meyer wishes to offer instruction in a foreign weapon but does it in a way those from the German fighting tradition will understand because of the similarity of guards and cuts with accurate translation of Marozzo’s techniques into their Lichtenauer equivalents, yet he seems to indicate that it might be better for the Germans to stick with what they are familiar. His closing remark of, “...the nearer one remains to nature with one’s custom, the more one will accomplish.” seems odd considering he is advocating the study of this foreign weapon. Although he is most likely making the case for the Germans to get used to parrying with the dagger and rapier working in conjunction, the quote speaks to a certain traditionalist outlook that Meyer offers in the beginning of his book with lines such as, “Moreover no proof is needed that it was the custom with our ancestors and the ancient Germans to raise their youth in knightly practice along with other good arts,...”.¹¹⁷ This inclusion of address of the Germans and allusion to some sort of particular German tendency or nature speaks to a bit of a conflict for Meyer.

Throughout the rapier section Meyer not only translates the Italian style into terms with which Germans will be familiar, but he is connecting it to the Lichtenauer tradition and thus making it distinctly German. Not only are the guards and cuts explained with German names, but the devices are reminiscent of his longsword material. Anyone who has studied and

¹¹⁷ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 38.

understands his longsword section should be able to effectively fight with the rapier as he explains it especially when it comes to cuts becoming thrusts and thrusts becoming cuts.

The dagger section contains the same use of guard names as well as principles and techniques although these are very much simplified. There are three guards, *Oberhut* (High Guard), *Underhut* (Low Guard), and *Mittelhut* (Middle Guard) plus several parryings with only the *Kreuzhut* (Cross Guard) named.¹¹⁸ There are only eleven pages in Forging's translation of Meyer. There is no instance of any of the German keywords in it.

The final section of Meyer's 1570 treatise concerns combat with the quarterstaff, halberd, and pike. Despite the frequent use of the straight parry as seen in the rapier section, as well as numerous instances of thrusting, Meyer makes no mention of this practice being unusual in the German schools like he did in the rapier section. Guard names, named techniques and principles, as well as the organization of the lessons are similar to his dagger section. There is no further addressing of any German peculiarities or comparisons with Italians.

What started with much fanfare and waves of praise for the German people and the Duke of Bavaria ends with a very antiseptic treatment of staff weapons. Meyer's book ends here with no further advice to the reader for the conduct of their practice or the promotion of German values. The techniques are fantastic and the explanations quite intricate, but there is no more evidence of nationalist sentiments as there is in any other analysis merely based on pedagogy, which is telling in and of itself, but already evidenced in previous sections.

¹¹⁸ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 235-237.

Ulrich Von Hutten's Militant Nationalism

In stark contrast to Meyer's willingness to adopt a foreign weapon into the German lexicon of weapons study is the distrust of outsiders, namely Italian clerics, of Ulrich Von Hutten at the time of the Reformation. Hutten is an example of an earlier manifestation of the values that Meyer advocated and serves as an example of how the enthusiasm for nationalistic ideas can cloud judgment and lead people to isolating themselves thus denying the resources that are needed to carry out their ultimate aims.

Despite Meyer's use of the term "knightly Germans" in his introduction his value enumerations are not meant to be a treatise on chivalry. Meyer never uses the word "chivalry". He very clearly asserts that these are German values.¹¹⁹ But being trained from a young age in the fighting arts, he is a part of that tradition. Meyer was not the first German to attach these values to the German people instead of to a certain class. Earlier in the sixteenth century Ulrich von Hutten went much further in his championing the Reformation militarily.

Hutten attempted to appeal directly to the German people by writing in German. Previously, writing dealing with the issues of the Reformation was in Latin, Hutten's included. But Hutten sought to rile the whole of Germany to reject the Roman Church because it had lost its way and the values enumerated by the teachings of Christianity were not being followed. He had travelled to Rome several times in his life and wrote about what he saw in German in "Lamentation and Appeal in rhyme against the Unchristian Power of the Pope and the Unholy Men in Holy Orders" in 1520.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Although he does say, "knightly German" values.

¹²⁰ David Friedrich Strauss, *Ulrich Von Hutten: His Life and Times* (New York: AMS Press, 1970), 241.

Despite Hutten's objection being to religious affairs and not necessarily secular, the interrelatedness of the two in the sixteenth century meant that the effect of attacking one was inevitably going to result in consequences for the other. Hutten eventually led an unsuccessful revolt known as the Knights Revolt. Initially he railed against Rome as a pamphleteer, but after Martin Luther's spirited defense at the Diet of Worms he took a much more militaristic approach. As Hajo Holborn states, "Now when literary activity by itself could achieve little further, he sought a substitute in the strong sword of the knight."¹²¹ Holborn relates Hutten's nationalist zeal when he observes, "It is no accident that he, who had more national feeling and less particularism than most of his contemporaries, should now in the midst of studies on the history and character of the Franks, expressly declare that his German ideal must be predominantly represented and conserved by the knights."¹²² The same ideals that Meyer identifies as being present in the Germans are also identified by Hutten, "While admitting faults among the knights, he portrayed the cities as even further degenerated from the primitive German ideal of manliness and simplicity."¹²³ Hutten was unable to mount a significant military resistance to the Roman Catholics and only succeeded in causing the alienation of the knightly class from the cities because of his rejection of the rather new form of law that he found distasteful. He died on August 29th, 1523 and was such a polarizing figure that the townspeople where he died fled when they heard whose body was in their midst.¹²⁴

Hutten's nationalist zeal had been driven by a distrust of the 'outsider' as the Roman Church was perceived juxtaposed with a feeling of German righteousness. This distrust was certainly exacerbated by the image of high living and loose morals of the resident Italian clergy

¹²¹ Hajo Holborn, *Ulrich Von Hutten and the German Reformation*, trans. Roland H. Bainton (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937), 177.

¹²² Holborn, *Ulrich Von Hutten*, 177.

¹²³ Holborn, *Ulrich Von Hutten*, 186.

¹²⁴ Holborn, *Ulrich Von Hutten*, 202.

as well as the buying of offices with a stipend by non-resident Italians. Nationalists frequently call on their particular groups feeling of fear and distrust of others and contrast them with their own feelings of superiority. In Hutten and Meyer's cases the Germans being the inheritors of the Roman tradition through the advent of the Holy Roman Empire. It is this level that Dekker, Malová, and Hoogendoorn identify as "National Superiority". Hutten's failure at leading a large scale revolt because of a lack of support from the cities and much of the populace shows that Germany must not have been at that level of national unity at that particular time. The cities of the time were fairly comfortable with their relative autonomy and did not wish to lend too much credence to any Catholic calls to the emperor to conquer them. Hutten's zeal was thus countered more by practical considerations and political calculations than by being outfought.

George Silver frequently goes to the same lengths that Hutten would in his distrust of others, and promotion of the superiority of his own people. But Silver lived during a time and in a place in which it was very safe and actually advantageous to be highly nationalistic. England had long since defeated the Spanish Armada (or at least their weather had with help from Spanish logistical follies) and was on the rise as an economic and cultural powerhouse. William Shakespeare's histories sang the praises of Henry V and VII, vilified Joan of Arc and Richard III. Queen Elizabeth had constructed a "Cult of the Virgin" around herself thus offering herself as the focal point for nationalist sentiments. Silver did not have to invoke the Queen for his nationalist fury. His fear was in the intrusion of foreign sword instructors who were introducing the English to the rapier with growing success. Silver advocated short weapons as being proper English weapons and thought of rapiers as being just as dangerous to the user as they were to the opponent. Silver's advocacy of short weapons was also based on his assertion that it took courage and skill to use the shorter weapons, thus implying that the Italians and French who

advocated the rapier were cowards and unskilled. Because Silver's writing contains all the elements set out by Dekker, Malová, and Hoogendoorn for "National Superiority" and lived during a time of a decidedly English state, he can be easily classified as their ultimate category of "Nationalism".

Meyer neither lived during a time of an independent German state nor expressed a fear of foreigners. He states that he has travelled extensively and learned from many different masters especially as it relates to the rapier.¹²⁵ However he did show a fear of losing certain elements of what he viewed as particularly German values much the same as Hutten. Hutten had not realized that these values had been lost perhaps. Meyer was not so proud as to ignore the utility of the rapier. He not only wrote that it was worthy of study but went so far as to make its study palatable to Germans by fitting it into their already existing systems based on the teachings of Liechtenauer. If the reader did not know of the teachings of Achille Marozzo, he might believe that Meyer had concocted these teachings himself. The only other German to have written on the rapier before Meyer was Paulus Hector Mair.

In this chapter Meyer's 1570 treatise was analyzed for elements that speak to his appreciation of foreign weapons and teachings and how closely his translation of the Bolognese side-sword is to the Liechtenauer system which was recognized as being the basis for all the German fighting guilds. His rapier section furthers the tempering of nationalism idea by offering an entirely new weapon to the German martial arts tradition. He manages to present the weapon in a way that the German student does not have to feel that he is carrying himself like a foreigner and using foreign words if he chooses to keep his language pure at least in the context of his martial studies. Finally the nationalistic zeal of Von Hutten was examined in contrast with the

¹²⁵ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 38.

willingness of Meyer to adopt a foreign weapon (especially being the Italian rapier) thus illustrating how any nationalistic ideas that Meyer might have held were tempered with a greater appreciation for the fighting arts as a unified craft.

CHAPTER 4

MARTIAL AND NATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

In this chapter the study of martial arts is connected with nationalistic ideas through the use of a common philosophy, and the reason nationalism survived and the study of the martial arts did not in Europe will be explored. I draw comparisons with Japan and South Korea since in those countries, as in much of the East, nationalism and the martial arts are virtually synonymous. Since Meyer addressed the connection only peripherally, it is necessary to expand on what this connection entails and how any national mindset, if it exists, and prejudices affect the development, preservation, and nostalgia for martial arts. Finally, I offer an example of nationalism taken to an extreme not seen in Meyer to provide some frame of reference to how rational his rhetoric was and how a national leader can cause a shift in national identity by altering some aspect of martial culture.

The common denominator between martial arts and nationalistic ideas is philosophy. Both subjects draw on a certain philosophical tradition that is peculiar to their point of origin. The values, practices, and tendencies of a people are inexorably intertwined in the iconography and rhetoric of their institutions, as well as any codified martial systems in which they engage. East Asian systems that have been so popular in the West since the 1960s are notorious for the use of flags, pictures of instructors in what amounts to shrines, bowing, and tea ceremonies.¹²⁶ Every Aikido dojo has a picture of the founder of the system, Morihei Ueshiba, also known as Ōsensei, along with the pedigree chart of his students. Being a rather young system most dojo

¹²⁶ Some of these tea ceremonies are simple promotion affairs and some turn into parties more akin to wedding receptions. My own Taekwondo Black Belt promotion was fairly simple fortunately.

owners can trace their learning lineage within a few degrees of separation from Ōsensei. Taekwondo dojangs also practice this tradition, but it usually involves a picture of the school owner's teacher. Quite often the national flags of the country the school is in and the country of the art's origin flank the portrait. Aikido dojos in particular show great care in the simplicity and utilitarianism of their décor, along with including naturalistic elements like plants and photos of nature scenes, in keeping with the Zen ideas of calmness and simplicity that are at the heart of Aikido philosophy.

These Asian systems are also highly nationalistic in that they are points of national pride. For example, the South Korean government actually established a governmental body to oversee Taekwondo. Kukkiwon (or the World Taekwondo Headquarters) is part of the South Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism.¹²⁷ In Asia nationalistic entities are more likely to be connected to the government than they seem to be in the West. This is basically because of their views about deference to authority figures. The East Asian mindset is also more apt to cling to old ways either out of a realization of the need to preserve their historical identity or in order to maintain the vehicle of passing on philosophical ideas. This mindset is one of the reasons why the Asian martial arts were able to survive gunpowder warfare and various incarnations of bans on their practice.¹²⁸

The Western European tradition since the Enlightenment is to tend to have more of a mind towards continuing development in order to gain advantage. This “newer is always better” approach leads to quickly losing certain aspects of culture very quickly because technological

¹²⁷ Kukkiwon, "World Taekwondo Federation," <http://www.kukkiwon.or.kr/eng/index.action> (accessed October 20, 2010).

¹²⁸ Often these bans were internally imposed by fearful rulers, not necessarily by outside conquerors.

developments have made the usefulness of a certain type of training discipline obsolete.¹²⁹ This mindset is also the chief reason why sword training and ultimately unarmed martial training did not survive the development of gunpowder warfare. If combat was to take place at long distances then the need for training to fight hand to hand would necessarily diminish. Proficiency at fighting hand to hand takes considerably longer than training in the use of a piece of equipment that relies on its technology. Such training takes time and costs money; in the increasingly larger armies since the fourteenth in Europe both were at a premium.¹³⁰ The common soldiers who made up the bulk of an army needed to work their land instead of engaging in constant training. Crossbow and gunpowder technologies allowed them to become effective with far less training than those of the warrior class or mercenaries who spent a large proportion of their non-combat time training. Therefore, the large scale abandonment of close combat training by the bulk of society becomes a simple question of economics.

However, the explosion of interest in the Eastern martial arts proves that the desire for close-combat skills combined with a strong philosophical underpinning has been lurking in the Western tradition since the training of those organically grown skills disappeared around the eighteenth century. Once the open practice of martial arts was allowed in Japan in the 1960s American soldiers stationed there flocked to it.¹³¹ Perhaps there were many who simply wanted to look as “cool” or be as dangerous as the actors they saw in movies, but those who still practice today and run their own schools teach their students as much about how to think and act outside of the school environment as they do about how to break someone’s arm. Their desire for such

¹²⁹ Library science research skills are perhaps the best example that this writer has experienced recently!

¹³⁰ Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West 1500-1800*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 2.

¹³¹ Mark Bishop, *Okinawan Karate: Teachers, Styles, and Secret Techniques*, (New York: Tuttle Publishing, 1999), 11.

training was so great because their own culture no longer practiced it in a unified way, meaning the training of technique and social discipline together. Little did they know that their own European background¹³² was as rich in codified martial traditions that included a strong philosophical component as the ones to which they were now flocking. Yes, they knew about the existence of knights, chivalry, and western philosophy. But the confluence of the two was not widely considered. Even today, the idea that pre-modern fighting men were little more than bashers and mashers is ingrained in the European psyche mostly because of images replayed over and over by the film industry.

Fight choreographers and stunt performers of today are the philosophical descendants of the same “sword mummies” mentioned by both Liechtenauer and Meyer. The ill-reputed placed upon such performers by Meyer is evident when he states,

...but also so that the experienced practitioner may understand that the practice of combat has its origin in a true rational foundation, and is not based on slipshod sword-mummery. For there is a very big difference between such mummery and combat, and indeed the knightly art of combat has always been held in great esteem by all widely experienced soldiers, especially the Romans, while street-mummies are taken for the most worthless and useless folk in the world.¹³³

Liechtenauer calls them *Leychmeistere* and places the indictment upon them, “With their bad parries and wide fencing they try to look dangerous with wide and long strikes that are slow and with these they perform strikes that miss and create openings in themselves. They have no

¹³² Stating that military members of the time had a common European heritage might seem racially insensitive, but at the time the military was primarily made up of people of European descent. Such is not so much the case anymore, but the statement is still accurate considering the philosophical and institutional traditions of the United States are of European origin.

¹³³ Meyer, *Art of Combat*, 49.

proper reach in their fencing and that belongs not to real fencing but only to school fencing and the exercises for their own sake.”¹³⁴

When did this tendency for westerners to abandon the old begin? Certainly it was not during the medieval period. Although there was quite a bit of development going on, especially in the twelfth century according to Charles Homer Haskins, the rule of the church still largely kept widespread abandonments of old ways that reinforced church power impossible.¹³⁵ If the European Renaissance was a time of study into the ancient works of the Greeks and Romans, then the emergence of such a traditionalist mindset is antithetical to the movement of looking back. But perhaps it is the period known as the Enlightenment that is more at fault. As Theodore Rabb puts it, “...It [Enlightenment society] had shaken off the reverence for antiquity; it had raised doubts about the glory of war; it had limited the authority of the supernatural; and it had resolved difficult struggles over centralized political authority and the role of the Church.”¹³⁶ If Rabb’s statement holds true then people at the time he recognizes as the end of the Renaissance imagined themselves as masters of their own destinies with antiquity being little more than a quaint curiosity. Thus, they could learn nothing but background from a knowledge base that pre-dated them. This creates a culture of rabid progressivism that assumes that what is new must therefore be better than what is old, and all degrees in between.

The Enlightenment was a time of abandonment of what might be construed as “old ways” en masse amongst the elites who participated in it. Religion was the principle victim ultimately considering the blame it received for the destruction of the Thirty Years War. Skepticism, although not entirely accepted as a right and proper way of life, was actually tolerated to a

¹³⁴ Döbringer, “Cod.HS.3227a.” trans. David Lindholm, 14R,14V.

¹³⁵ Charles Homer Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*, (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1927).

¹³⁶ Theodore K. Rabb, *The Last Days of the Renaissance* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 208.

greater degree. Sir Isaac Newton might have been the catalyst for the greatest paradigm shift of the time, but he was also a noted theologian and wrote more about religious ideas than he did about science. Despite his religious leanings, his views did not exactly match up with prevailing ideologies, especially those relating to the trinity. Just a century or so earlier Newton might have been burned at the stake or at least marginalized by the church as a heretic. The fact that he was not is a small anecdote to the diminished power of the church and the acceptance of the scientific method and natural law as opposed to God's law.

The effective use of gunpowder weapons in massed formations that were easily maneuvered on the battlefield made close-combat warfare nearly obsolete by the end of the seventeenth century. Chivalry as a code of behavior was closely linked to close-combat training. Teachers like Meyer and Lichtenauer taught both in a unified manner. Chivalry was lumped together with the mysticism and martial arts of what amounted to a "bygone age" and was either totally abandoned or morphed into something much more benign than it had been.

The Current Reintegration of Close-Combat Training and Warrior Ethos

The links between close-combat training, nationalistic ideas, and certain vestiges of the chivalric code have reemerged in recent times and are more accepted. Just prior to the attacks of September 11th, 2001 the United States Military was already seeking ways to reinforce a visible philosophical code to their training and lifestyle. The Army introduced the Army Values with the acronym of LDRSHIP (which of course is supposed to look like "leadership"): Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal courage. In 1997 the Air Force introduced its Core Values of, "Integrity first, Service before self, and Excellence in all that we

do.”¹³⁷ The Air Force has gone further with The Airman’s Creed which seeks to combat the idea of Air Force personnel as not necessarily combatants like their Army and Marine brethren.¹³⁸

For the most part these listed values are in line with the general ideas of the chivalric code. Despite the loss of the martial tradition, the values system has to some degree endured in the military. Civilian ideas of such warrior values systems have been largely misunderstood to be more about niceties and deportment, which was a part, but as evidenced by the enumerated values of the US Army and Air Force, this is mostly about warrior behavior, why one fights, and what the warrior should expect from his compatriots more so than what treatment he should expect from the enemy. Johannes Lichtenauer summed up this general idea of deportment in the verse recoded by Hankö Döbringer in 1389, “Young knights learn to love God and honor women. Be chivalrous and learn the art that your honor will increase in war.”¹³⁹ In this verse Lichtenauer is linking honor with the renown won of skill and the application of chivalry, which is a nearly impossible code to live by, but the pursuit is what matters. Meyer is much more verbose on the subject yet basically says the same thing with his single sentence,

Therefore I hope that even if my writing is little heeded by some, yet many honest fellows and young fighters will come forth, and diligently restrain and guard themselves from the disorderly life, gluttony, boozing, blasphemy, cursing, whoring, gambling, and the like through which this noble art has been besmirched by many people, since this knightly art has been used by many people only for shameful lewdness and laziness, which are most deeply deplored by honorable people and all honorable combatants; and instead they will seek to thoroughly understand this art, and to learn to apply a true honorable earnestness, to purge themselves of useless peasants’ brawling, and to be diligent in all manliness, discipline, and breeding, so that when they have truly and fully

¹³⁷ Department of the Air Force, "United States Air Force Core Values" United States Air Force e-publishing, January 1, 1997. <http://www.e-publishing.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-070906-003.pdf> (accessed January 25, 2011).

¹³⁸ United States Air Force, *Airman's Manual AFPAM 10-100* (Washington DC: Department of the Air Force, 2009), ii.

¹³⁹ Lindholm and Svärd, *Sigmund Ringeck's Knightly Art of the Longsword*, 17.

learnt this art, and lead an honorable life, then they may be thought able to direct others, and particularly the youth, and thereby to be of service.¹⁴⁰

Indeed, Meyer was not speaking to the video game generation, nor did he come from a military tradition that had developed an appreciation for brevity of speech and acronyms. Meyer puts forth the “Spiderman” moral of “With great power comes great responsibility” which is at the heart of the self-denial of warrior codes all over the world.

The current United States Military values systems are introduced virtually from the first day a recruit is sworn-in. The oath of enlistment contains many of the qualities that both Lichtenauer and Meyer enumerate.

I, (name), do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God."

The ceremony is conducted with a uniformed officer delivering the oath and a prominent United States Flag is required to be present by law. No one seems to think twice about the connection of blatant nationalistic iconography and language with the military today, and they connect the military with combat training which must include hand-to-hand.

The military actually went through a period of retreat from training for the up close and personal form of warfare illustrated in manuals such as Meyer's. The effective use of gunpowder weapons made their study anachronistic to say the least. The use of the bayonet was the last vestige of hand to hand combat to survive intact. The British Army's fearsomeness in

¹⁴⁰ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 41-42.

their heyday of the eighteenth century was largely due to their willingness to close with an enemy in order to use oversized bayonets. The British Army became famous for this tactic and it was what caused American riflemen to break ranks so often because they largely did not have bayonets, or if they did they, as is the case with the regulars, had not been very well trained in their use, in the American Revolution.¹⁴¹ By the time of the Cold War the general thinking was that wars would be decided in a mechanized manner whether through the use of tanks and artillery, air power, or nuclear means.

The United States Marine Corps never totally abolished bayonet training because they feel it helps cultivate the warrior mentality in recruits. Pugil sticks, their padded training tool, is often cited by basic trainees as one of the seminal experiences of their time in Boot Camp. But even the Marines would have to admit that it is not their hand to hand technique training that led to their battlefield victories. The mental development did, and that is what they are after.

Mental development gave way to real employment around the year 2000. The Army had already been working on a hand-to-hand program that became the Army Combatives Program under Sergeant First Class Matthew Larsen. His program was largely the domain of the Special Operations Command¹⁴² until 2002 when it became apparent that counter-terror operations in Afghanistan were going to feature much more asymmetrical warfare than previously thought. The Army Combatives Program and the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program (MCMAP) became required training following the emergence of counter-insurgent warfare in an urban setting becoming the norm for operations in Iraq. Since wide-scale employment of these training regimens both services have recognized the installation of a warrior ethos, their own chosen

¹⁴¹ Baron von Steuben's "Blue Book" and his training of George Washington's Army during winter quarters at Valley Forge (1778-79) filled this gap and led to fewer instances of retreat from British bayonet charges.

¹⁴² SFC Larsen was a Ranger. USSOC is comprised of units such as the Army Rangers and Special Forces, Navy SEALs, Air Force Para-rescue and Combat Controllers, and Delta Force.

values systems, and the training of hand-to-hand and non-firearm technique in their recruits as a truly integrated system. All the services have recognized the necessity of creating “warriors” instead of “soldiers”. Such a differentiation is exactly what Meyer and the other fighting masters of the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries were worried about. As mentioned earlier, Meyer laments the use of sword tricks as “mummery” which is more of an indictment of those who can do a few showy tricks rather than training in a system based on foundational principles that can be applied to produce a myriad of counters based on the combatants own attributes.

Such melding of nationalist symbolism and warrior ethos is exactly the sort of idea that comes through in Meyer’s work. Meyer and Lichtenauer both specifically state that they seek to train the youth. In Meyer’s case he was working to counter what he viewed as the degradation of the art by both disuse and misuse, hence his enumeration of vices such as, “boozing and whoring.”¹⁴³ Today, such prohibitions are institutionalized in the United States Military’s Uniformed Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) and the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC). The UCMJ is a much more strict code of conduct than the civilian legal system in much the same way that a member of the warrior class of the sixteenth century would be expected to behave in a much more dignified manner than commoners because he was expected to live up to the chivalric code, whatever it happened to be in his time and place. As my commander in Korea pointed out once, “We hold you to a higher standard. Never forget it.”

¹⁴³ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 42.

The Worthiness of the *Fechtbuchs*

These manuals were much more than mere formulas and exercises for learning how to defend in a fight. They are instructions on how to conduct yourself as a person who took the defense and promotion of the society as a matter of personal responsibility. Predominantly this meant the warrior class.

A statistical analysis of what percentage of the warrior class was literate, much less capable of writing on the level of Meyer or Ulrich Von Hutten would be problematic at best. But the fact that there were at least a few who were capable of such high literary accomplishment offers at least the impression they were more than brawlers. Meyer fights this stereotype not by denying it, but by offering his treatise as the proper way for a fighting man to conduct himself when he states, "...and the like through which this noble art has been besmirched by many people, since this knightly art has been used by many people only for shameful lewdness and laziness, which are most deeply deplored by honorable people and all honorable combatants; and instead they will seek to thoroughly understand this art, and to learn to apply a true honorable earnestness, to purge themselves of useless peasants' brawling..."¹⁴⁴ Meyer continues with listing several vices that were well known pursuits of those who frequented establishments that offered martial training. His frequent use of "honorable" and the identification of the listed activities as "deeply deplored" by those honorable people sets the perpetrators of those deplorable actions apart as distinctly dishonorable and thus unworthy of studying his art.

Meyer's status as a burgher, especially since he attained the status through marriage, and not as a member of the nobility is evidence that the ideas of chivalrous, or at least honorable,

¹⁴⁴Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 42.

conduct was conceptualized by non-nobles. Indeed, the nobility of Meyer's time were much more political animals than purely involved in the practice of arms. They had to run estates, engage in commerce and diplomacy, and secure advantageous marriages for their children to preserve or advance the family. Fighting was as much a part of education as mathematics, economics, theology, language, rhetoric, etc. The particular study of fighting was left to specialists or those particularly talented in martial arts. Since some introductory training was necessary before someone could begin an in depth analysis of fighting principles it is apparent that the lower classes would not be privy to such activities. It fell to the middle classes such as the burghers or those employed as soldiers who might have managed to attain some education would fill this niche of martial writers and instructors.

The true value of the writings of these men is that they provide a window into the thoughtfulness, intentions, motivations, and emotions of people who had to use the principles and techniques enumerated in the texts in order to survive. This survival was not just in the realm of living through battles or street fights, but in the offering of a commodity that was in demand. A teacher whose students routinely lost would very quickly have market forces leave him without means. This is the reason why Fiore dei Liberi goes to such great pains to list the accomplishments of his students, "That said Fiore was more and more times required by many Gentlemen and Knights and Squires for learning from the said Fiore made art of all arms and armour and fighting in the barriers to the death which art he has demonstrated to more Italian and German and other great Gentleman who had to fight in the barriers."¹⁴⁵ Fiore goes on to list a

¹⁴⁵ The Exiles: Company of Medieval Martial Artists, "Fiore dei Liberi Project: Getty Representation," *The Exiles*, 2005, trans. Rob Lovett, Mark Davidson, and Mark Lancaster, [http://www.the-exiles.org.uk/fioreproject/Fiore%20Getty%20MS%20Representation%20\(Translation\).pdf](http://www.the-exiles.org.uk/fioreproject/Fiore%20Getty%20MS%20Representation%20(Translation).pdf) (accessed October 1, 2010), 4.

number of students who fought and survived battles and duels and describes how his students and their families hold him such high regard.

But besides such mercenary ideas as the preservation of job security, there are philosophical components. These center on honorable conduct, faith in God, and deference to authority. These were not men who just sat about in comfortable surrounding and spouted philosophy that only needed to have proper rhetorical construction to be seen as worthy. They had lived their philosophies and spoke their warnings about straying from the paths they laid out because they had seen the results of such ignorance. They warn against things like “sword-mummery” because they know that the techniques do not work in combat and that if the purveyors of such conduct are regarded as true masters, their pupils will die in great numbers. Those pupils would likely be the defenders of the realms inhabited by the writers. Of course they do not wish to see their homes conquered.

The writers of the fighting manuals enumerate the things that were important to them enough to be willing to take another’s life or to die for them. Such willingness has to be the highest endorsement that humans can bestow upon any concept. A values system that did not provide some meaning to a life surrounded by death was useless. The fighting manual authors’ philosophy is born of their psychology. Instead of ignoring their philosophical content because their writings appear only as instructions for killing, modern historians should instead lend greater attention to said content because of the inclusion of martial content. If we are to understand their life-ways, we must understand what things would lead them to commit these acts and to put themselves at such risk.

If we only study warfare as written by people who have not risked their lives, then we run the risk of not coming to grips with the realization made by John Keegan, “I have not been in a battle; not near one, nor heard one from afar, nor seen the aftermath...But I have never been in a battle. And I grow increasingly convinced that I have very little idea of what a battle can be like.”¹⁴⁶ This statement is from one of the most well known military historians of the latter twentieth century. Keegan’s value is that even after all of his study into military affairs he admits that he has little idea what a battle is really like. The men who wrote the fighting manual such as Meyer and Liechtenauer did, and their values systems reflect that experience. As Sydney Anglo puts it, “My concern throughout [this book] is with what the masters thought they were doing when they wrote their treatises, and with the methods whereby they sought to systematize the activities pursued in their schools in order to convey essential information to absent third parties—that is their readers. Some tackled this daunting task with heroic incompetence; others were remarkably intelligent, ingenious and effective. All merit serious attention.”¹⁴⁷

George Silver and English Ultra-Nationalism

When a significant world leader makes a decision we often look back on that decision as some sort of turning point in events, culture, government, technology, etc. In the old model of determining significance historians would focus on how these leaders’ actions impacted large scale events like battles, power structures, and economic prosperity. A good example of how one of the most well known leaders in European history changed some aspect of how people viewed fighting is Elizabeth I’s limiting of sword length in 1566. Within a generation the view

¹⁴⁶ John Keegan, *The Face Of Battle* (New York: Viking Press, 1976), 13.

¹⁴⁷ Anglo, *The Martial Arts of Renaissance Europe*, 5.

of short weapons as being indicative of the English seems to have taken hold if the writings of George Silver are any indication.

In 1566 Elizabeth I limited the length that a sword could be in an act that was mostly dealing with sumptuary regulations known as *Enforcing Statues of Apparel* on the 12th of February.

And whereas a usage is crept in, contrary to former orders, of wearing of long swords and rapiers, sharpened in such sort as may appear to the usage of them can not tend to defense, which ought to be the very meaning of weapons in times of peace, but to murder and evident death, when the same shall be occupied: her Majesty's pleasure is that no man shall, after ten days next following this proclamation, wear any sword, rapier, or any weapon in their stead passing the length of one yard and half a quarter of blade at the uttermost, neither any dagger above the length of twelve inches in blade, neither any buckler with a sharp point or with any point above two inches in length, upon pain of forfeiting the sword or dagger passing the said length, and the buckler made otherwise than is prescribed, to whomsoever will seize upon it, and the imprisonment of his body that shall be found to wear any of them, and to make fine at her Majesty's will and pleasure.¹⁴⁸

This limitation has usually been identified as the blade length being a yard (36 inches).

However, blades from immediately after this period appear to be slightly longer. According to Francois Henri Guyon the length was actually more like 40.5 inches since the act actually reads, “a yard and half-a-quarter”.¹⁴⁹ Regardless of which length was the rule, the effect it had on what was seen as particularly “English” in terms of fighting arts is significant.

English martial arts treatises are not nearly as numerous as their continental counterparts in the 16th Century. But one stands out as showing the evidence of Elizabeth’s effect and was published just before the end of that century. The gentleman George Silver wrote *Paradoxes of*

¹⁴⁸ Maggie Secara, “Elizabethan Sumptuary Statutes,” Elizabethan.org, 2001, <http://www.elizabethan.org/sumptuary/ruffs-hose-swords.html#swords> (accessed November 2010).

¹⁴⁹ Francois Henri Guyon, "Sir your sword is too long!," *zipworld.com.au*, 1999, <http://www.zipworld.com.au/~zebee/length.htm> (accessed October 2010).

*Defence*¹⁵⁰ as a scathing indictment of the Italian and French sword masters who were immigrating to England. His attacks center on what he considers being the ridiculous length of the weapons and calls them “false defence”. He contends that such length has eliminated the need for real skill gained through training and mastery of the principles of *defence*. Such weapons, particularly the rapier, offer no protection to the user and are meant entirely for offensive purposes. Thus, they are only good for slaughter and picking fights, and not for innocent defending of one’s person.¹⁵¹

Silver states that fighting with shorter weapons was the way the English had always done it. Certainly, in Silver’s mind the use of shorter weapons was part of English martial identity. “...our forefathers were wife, though our age account them foolifh, valiant though we account them cowardes: they found out the true defence of their bodies in fhort weapons by their wifedome, they defended themfelues and fubdued their enemies, with thofe weapons with their valour.”¹⁵²

He even goes so far as to say that Henry V’s army at Agincourt used particularly short weapons compared the French, and that English weapons have always been shorter and thus reflect the skill and courage of the English fighting man.¹⁵³ Yet Elizabeth saw enough of a problem with increasing sword length by Englishmen that she saw fit to limit it thirty-three years before *Paradoxes*, and the Harleian Manuscript¹⁵⁴ dates to around the time of Agincourt and focuses on the use of the very longsword that Silver attacks as “un-English”. Plus, the English victory at Agincourt is mostly attributed to the long range, armor penetration, and high volume

¹⁵⁰ Silver, *Paradoxes of Defense*.

¹⁵¹ Silver, *Paradoxes of Defense*, 5.

¹⁵² Silver, *Paradoxes of Defense*, 4.

¹⁵³ Silver, *Paradoxes of Defense*, 5.

¹⁵⁴ Unknown, "Harleian Manuscript," *Black Falcon School of Arms*. 2006, <http://www.blackfalconschool.com/harley.shtml> (accessed October 2010).

of fire capabilities of the English longbow coupled with French heavy cavalry getting bogged down in deep mud. At Agincourt, short weapons had nothing to do with the English victory if they even possessed that characteristic.

Only one manuscript dates to near the time of Elizabeth's issuance of the 1566 act. The Ledall Manuscript¹⁵⁵ dates to the mid-16th Century. This very loose dating can mean that it is actually after 1566, but since most martial arts treatises are the result of nearly a lifetime of study by the author it is safe to presume that the techniques are indicative of how fighting was done (at least by the author) for perhaps twenty years before setting them down. So even if the document was written as late as 1570 it most likely reflects how fighting was done prior to 1566. What is significant in the Ledall Manuscript that pertains to the subject of shorter weapons is that the cutting technique appears to be rather compact. Counter attacks are executed as actions from the bind similar to German manuals of the tradition of Johannes Liechtenauer. Even the triangular footwork as seen in Joachim Meyer is present.¹⁵⁶ Nearly every technique of Meyer includes the phrase "step well out to his left" which presents a triangular pattern to footwork since the left foot then sweeps to the right as well in order to bring the combatant square to his adversary. Such elements from this English manual that are not present in the earlier Harleian and Cotton Titus¹⁵⁷ manuscripts are evidence of the sharing of information amongst martial artists across national boundaries. Although more compact movements can possibly be attributed to shortened weapons, thus meaning that the manual reflects techniques after the 1566 act, it is more indicative of the way in which cuts were executed with the longsword on the continent. Instead

¹⁵⁵ Unknown, "Ledall Manuscript," *Black Falcon School of Arms*, 2006.
<http://www.blackfalconschool.com/ledall.shtml> (accessed October 2010).

¹⁵⁶ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*.

¹⁵⁷ Unknown, "Cottonian Manuscript," *Black Falcon School of Arms*, 2006,
<http://www.blackfalconschool.com/cotton.shtml> (accessed October 2010).

of a “cleaving” action that most attribute to how a sword was used to cut, the Liechtenauer tradition manuscripts advocate cutting from guards held rather close to the body and snapping out into and through a position known as *langort*, or “longpoint” which is with the sword pointed directly at the adversary’s heart with the arms extended. This manner of performing cuts leads to very compact actions that are very easily changed into thrusts. Thrusting is very limited in the previous English manuscripts.

The significance Elizabeth’s effect on weapon length with the 1566 Sumptuary Statutes has to do with perception and memory and how they play into what Silver identified as being an element of national character in the use of shorter weapons. George Silver learned how to fight just after 1566, thus had most likely been trained with a weapon of Elizabeth’s determined legal length. He assumed that “Englishness” was inherent in the use of shorter weapons because the French and Italians were using longer ones. He was wrong but he sincerely thought he was right. Elizabeth had inadvertently altered the perception of what was seen as indicative of English fighting. Political leaders throughout history have yearned for this very power.¹⁵⁸ All it takes is a generation, sometimes two, for a people to forget the “old ways”, adopt something new, and even reinvent what those “old ways” were. Silver is obviously a victim of this phenomenon.

Elizabeth’s shortening of weapon length had little actual effect on how the English employed their weapons as far as being distinct from the rest of Europe. Silver’s ideas on timing and footwork are very similar to those of the Germans. The German longsword was not a particularly long weapon when compared to the rapier, so the techniques of either to defeat the rapier were not necessarily different which is why Meyer is able to impose the Liechtenauer

¹⁵⁸ Jeremy Black, *Using History* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005).

system on the rapier so successfully. Silver's ideas on how long a longsword should be were shorter than the German and particularly the Italian sources. Silver advocates a sword whose pommel comes to a hand's width of the armpit with the point on the ground. The longest length suggested by any manual are some of the Italians that state that the pommel should rest at armpit level. That is only about a four inch difference. However, the rapier was a different story. Rapiers were regularly as long as five feet. That is over a foot longer than Elizabeth's mandate.

Finally, there is the nationalistic aspect of Silver's work. Silver was very proud of his heritage and was involved with the fighting guilds that operated in England at the time.¹⁵⁹ Foreign masters were a threat to his associates because they brought a new fashion that threatened their business. Silver was working to protect the interest of his group of acquaintances. Beyond that there is a tradition in England of civilian training for war and the mandating of militia training. Longbow shooting was required on feast days. This requirement was not just to offer up some way for the common man to defend himself, it was for him to train in a discipline that the crown would need either to defend the realm from foreign invasion or to itself invade to gain new lands. Training in the sword and buckler was also common and was even used as a recreational pursuit.¹⁶⁰

In summary, Elizabeth did have an effect on what someone like Silver saw as something particularly English and made it a point of pride. In this case, the use of shorter weapons than the continental "invaders" who were displacing their associates in the realm of martial arts instruction was threatening English martial identity. The real effect on alteration of technique is

¹⁵⁹ These guilds had been regulated in the 1599 act so that they could only operate in towns and at the discretion of the mayor of that town.

¹⁶⁰ Jeffery L. Forgeng, trans. *The Medieval Art of Swordsmanship: A Facsimile and Translation of Europe's Oldest Personal Combat Treatise, Royal Armouries MS. I.33* (New York: Chivarly Bookshelf and Royal Armouries of Leeds, 2003).

not evident because the compactness of longsword cutting techniques was already widespread by the time of the 1566 act which limited sword length. And finally, Silver's opinions are evidence of how martial culture becomes a part of a society and any threat to it is defended vigorously. National identity had steadily been growing following the Tudor consolidation of power under Henry VII. The defeat of the Spanish Armada tipped the scales into the realm of ultra-nationalism by giving the English an unbelievable victory to rally around and have superior feelings whether they were warranted or not. If the common citizen had a quarter of the nationalistic sentiment in Silver's clearly xenophobic work, it would be safe to say that ultra-nationalism was evident in England by the end of the 16th Century.

In this chapter the connection between martial arts as an artifact of national identity was made in the identification of certain practices and feelings in modern East Asian systems, how the martial arts are being reintegrated into the military forces of the United States and thus gaining a clear connection to a national institution with enumerated values, how the fighting manuals of the Pre and Early Modern Period offer a glimpse of an important aspect of life in those times and how they also enumerated certain values, and how a national leader managed to alter a perception of her people by changing via decree some aspect of their martial arts. All of these varied topics lead to the connection of the elements of group identity, a vital cultural artifact (in this case martial arts), stated values, and the effect of controlling authority on aspects of cultural artifacts which can alter the perceived identity.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Despite his advocacy of German ideals and the proper training of the German youth in martial arts that would reinforce those ideals, Joachim Meyer's work must be taken for what it ultimately is; the writings of one man. But how often does one man's writing strike a chord with a people and lead to something more than a minor sensation? Certainly Martin Luther's did, just as the Apostle Paul's, Thomas Payne's, and a host of others did. But Meyer did not achieve the long lasting fame that these other writers now enjoy. Meyer died in debt after most likely getting sick while travelling to a new job that he possibly took because he was so heavily in debt and wished to get a better price for his books. Meyer's book eventually became a hit and was reprinted in 1600 and was influential in the 1612 work of Jacob Suter as well as the 1672 work of Theodor Verolinus.

This assertion of Meyer's role is not entirely an argument for the "Great Man" approach to history. Quite the contrary, Meyer was a 'burgher' although quite well known as a sword instructor. The Duke of Mecklenburg would not be hiring him as a master of arms if he were not among the most well known of his time. Meyer did not singlehandedly change anything or invent a culture altering machine. But, like Luther, he did take advantage of such a machine in the form of the printing press. Meyer's ideas about the proper training of youth through the practice of arms could have a much wider distribution than Hänko Döbringer's manuscript on Liechtenauer ever could. Despite his fame within fencing circles of the time and with modern practitioners, Meyer will never be a household name. His contribution to our understanding of

how to perform the techniques is great since he goes to great lengths to offer definitions of terms and offer examples with a language that is rather close in development to modern German. Performance of the techniques might well lie in the realm of amateur practitioners but the ignoring of such knowledge leading to its loss is still as much a travesty as the atrophy of any other cultural artifact. As Syndey Anglo says, “Whatever the reasons, personal violence has been avoided by scholars working in the very areas where one might legitimately expect to discover something about it. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that students of the fine arts have also been reluctant to delve into such brutalities; and, as a consequence, they have ignored one of the most striking and continuous series of illustrated books in western graphic art.”¹⁶¹

The training of the fighting arts is so much more than performing a series of techniques correctly. Every known martial arts system has an attached philosophical system be it religious, a code of behavior, or hierarchy. Meyer’s writing provides ample evidence of this being the case as well for the martial arts of sixteenth century Germany. He urge his readers to, “...apply a true honorable earnestness, to purge themselves of useless peasants’ brawling, and to be diligent in all manliness, discipline, and breeding, so that when they have truly and fully learnt this art, and lead an honorable life, then they may be thought able to direct others, and particularly the youth, and thereby to be of service.”¹⁶² Meyer sees the training of the martial arts as an integral component of clean living and service to others. He particularly wishes this service to be to Germany. He uses all of the devices available to stir nationalist sentiments especially in the Dedicatory Preface directed towards Johann Casimir, the Duke of Bavaria. He is not above flattery as he compares the Duke to Scipio Africanus while drawing the same comparison between his fellow Germans and the Romans before they fell into licentiousness. “It follows

¹⁶¹ Anglo, *The Martial Arts of Renaissance Europe*, 3.

¹⁶² Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 42.

from this that many skilled knightly heroes and valuable protectors of the fatherland arose and were educated among these peoples; and the usefulness of applied diligence manifested itself even in youth, before they came to the full age of manhood, as can be seen especially in Scipio Africanus, who when he was still young—around eighteen years old—rescued his father, the citizen and supreme field marshal, in a battle that took place against Hannibal at the Ticino River; using the skills that he derived from this noble practice.”¹⁶³

Meyer certainly sees the hope of Germany in that fractured time resting on its adherence to upright morality. He may be flattering the Duke of Bavaria in order to sell his book to him, but Meyer was apparently already well known, hence why people asked him to write the book, and why the Duke of Mecklenburg hired him on as *fechtmeister*. Meyer sees the youth as the future. It is an often used cliché, but still true. He sees the morality necessary for Germany’s survival as being an integral part of martial arts training. He sees martial arts training as directly necessary for the defense of the realm. So Meyer is advocating to the Duke that he is the future because he is young, he is capable because he has proved himself in battle, and he can inspire the youth of Germany to follow his example and practice the martial arts for the good of their own character, the temporal defense of Germany, and to strengthen their own future. Unfortunately, Meyer was not well known enough to really affect any alteration on the plight of his art or his country. But any shift in nationalism cannot be credited to Meyer’s work; it is too obscure and known more for its pedagogical treatment of Liechtenauer’s teaching than any philosophical character. Does that make it not worthy study? Of course not. Meyer’s work offers a detailed explanation of how to fight with all the weapons in common usage in the schools at that time, as well as the incorporation of the rapier into the German tradition. Besides the explanation of

¹⁶³ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 37-38. Previously Meyer had made mention of the Duke’s age, thus the connection with Scipio.

technique Meyer also provides a very clear association of national identity and hopes for the future. The training and employment of the techniques is the vehicle to preserve and advance the philosophy. The two are dependent on one another and are both equally important cultural elements.

In Meyer's work we can see the deep love of country and the importance of what he considers a national artifact in the martial arts. Even though Meyer's Germany does not exist as a recognizable political entity, it is clear that it exists in his mind since he wrote about the values of its people so lovingly. His frequent use of "us Germans" and "Fatherland" couldn't have come from nowhere. Why else would he identify the role of the Germans in the rebirth of the Roman Empire when he states, "...and the knightly Germans were appointed and advanced before all peoples to save it, take it over, and erect it again."¹⁶⁴

Throughout this work I have linked ideas of national character to the training of martial arts. East Asian examples were necessary to showcase how a shift in attitude towards old knowledge doomed the preservation of the similar link between martial arts training and philosophical instruction in the European tradition. Although no culture is without its own shifts and thus there can be no pure "control" to make for good data, the East Asian sense of honoring the past and seeing value in it makes for the closest thing possible in this context. George Silver was addressed to illustrate both the moderation of Meyer and the difference in power exerted by Queen Elizabeth I of England as opposed to the Holy Roman Emperors in the late sixteenth century. In analyzing specific passages in Meyer the link was illustrated to the system set down by Liechtenauer and evidenced as a particularly German cultural artifact since every German martial arts treatise used that same structure. Meyer's nationalism was shown to be not merely

¹⁶⁴ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 38.

an insular entity since he included the rapier which was seen as an Italian weapon. Yet Meyer did not see fit to explain the weapon in the manner of the Italians from whom he learnt it, but to make it as German as the longsword by incorporating it into the Liechtenauer structure. Since no writing is made in a cultural or historical vacuum, the scene was set regarding the political and cultural context of Germany during Meyer's life and how his nationalistic views should be at odds with the political reality of late sixteenth century Germany.

Meyer's legacy as a hero is largely confined to a small community of practitioners of what is called Historical European Martial Arts. This community is non-academic in nature and seeks to reconstruct and practice the very martial arts that Meyer wrote about so lovingly. It was in this context that I became aware of Meyer. That activity is what drove me to a deeper appreciation and study of history. Meyer may have been largely unsuccessful in his goal of saving German values through the advocacy of practicing the vanishing (even in his time) martial arts of the German people who he saw as the cultural descendants of the Romans. But because his writing survived based on the efforts of curators and is now widely available because of the internet and the English translation of Jeffery Forgeng, Meyer's teaching to all of us to "...come forth, and diligently restrain and guard themselves from the disorderly life, gluttony, boozing, blasphemy, cursing, whoring, gambling, and the like through which this noble art has been besmirched by many people only for shameful lewdness and laziness, which are most deeply deplored by honorable people..."¹⁶⁵ is timeless and is important even for those who do not wish to train in the use of his weapons.

¹⁶⁵ Meyer, *The Art of Combat*, 42.

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