

# THE USE OF MEDIEVAL WEAPONRY

ERIC LOWE





## PRAISE FOR THE USE OF MEDIEVAL WEAPONS

Eric's book is the best one-stop survey of the wide swath of medieval European martial arts published so far. Part history lesson and part primer for enthusiasts, Eric's book is very much written in the voice of a seasoned enthusiast passing down what seems to be unrecorded wisdom to a new generation. He successfully juggles the real-world fighting guidance of over a dozen historical masters with the kind of joy that all modern swordpeople experience, best captured in his mantra, "We're all sword geeks here."

—Jake Norwood, President of Longpoint HEMA  
Tournaments and Workshops, founding member  
of the HEMA Alliance, and sword geek

Eric Lowe's *Use of Medieval Weaponry* is an introduction to Historical European Martial Arts takes a novel approach: he breaks down his survey not by the various fighting tradition of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, but by instead examining the different types of weapons in use; and only then addressing how each martial school employed and taught their use. The result is a whirlwind tour of several centuries of martial arts, supplemented with some very entertaining thoughts and

speculations on how these weapons would fare when pitted against each other. The book is sure to appeal to today's historians, martial practitioners, and combat researchers.

—Christian Henry Tobler, author of  
*Fighting with the German Longsword*

Lowe's survey of medieval and Early Renaissance fencing distills decades of HEMA research into a delightful and informative read. This one-of-a-kind book explains how people fought five hundred years ago and why they fought that way. This is a serious book that does not take itself too seriously—a perfect read for those new to our peculiar hobby or anyone seeking to conjure up the dusty battlefields and bloody streets of yore.

—Stephen Fratus, Author of *With Malice & Cunning: Anonymous 16th Century Manuscript on Bolognese Swordsmanship*

This book is a wonderful introduction to some of the most popular European weapons of the medieval and Renaissance periods. The author shows a great understanding of their use, and informs the reader in a very enjoyable fashion. There is something to learn for those who have limited knowledge to those with a more extensive one. If you are looking for a book to help you get your toes wet in either European weaponry and their usage, or Historical European Martial Arts in general, this is a great place to start.

—Keith Cotter-Reilly, Head Instructor,  
Atlanta Historical Fencing Academy

A great bird's-eye view of trends in how people fought in the medieval and early Modern periods. This book covers a good variety of the most popular weapons of the period, including various swords, polearms, and secondary weapons, and explains in some detail what historical treatises have to say about them. If you're looking for an introduction to the subject of medieval martial arts, Eric Lowe has you covered.

—Michael Chidester, Wiktenauer Director

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*Eric Lowe*

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## A NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

I am deeply grateful to the transcribers and translators of historical European fencing treatises whose work has helped make this book—and, indeed, the entire project of historical European martial arts—possible. More often than not, these translations are labors of love produced by nonprofessional translators and offered to the historical fencing community for little or no financial compensation.

One of the most significant contributions to the spread of the modern HEMA movement has been the Wiktenauer ([www.wiktenauer.com](http://www.wiktenauer.com)), a non-profit website dedicated to promoting and disseminating scans, transcriptions, and translations of historical European fencing treatises, free of charge. Several of the translations in this book are taken (with the permission of the various translators) from the Wiktenauer, while others are taken from print editions. Quotations from works in print are made to the page number of the modern print edition rather than the original manuscripts. The format of the Wiktenauer makes it difficult or impossible to cite where in a given author's work a quotation comes from, particularly as many translations draw from multiple manuscript copies of the same text. As a result, where I quote a translation from the Wiktenauer, I have made no attempt at specifying page or

folio numbers. Curious readers will find it easy to do a text search on the website. Where I quote a translation from a print edition, I cite the page number of the modern print edition.

In deference to the difficulty of the choices that any translator of historical fencing treatises must make, I have kept untranslated any words that a translator whose work appears in this book has chosen to leave in the original language. As a result, the reader will occasionally be confronted with technical fencing jargon in German, Italian, or Spanish. Editorial or explanatory comments in brackets are also the translator's, rather than my own.

I have tried to select quotations from treatises that minimize the necessity for the reader to understand technical terms, and to clarify these terms when and as they arise. However, there is one set of terms that recurs so frequently that we should discuss it here. Both *escrima comun* and Bolognese fencing treatises (for more on these terms, see Chapter 2) frequently refer to cuts by reference to whether the cut is forehand or backhand. In *escrima comun* treatises, a forehand cut is referred to as a *tajo*, while Bolognese treatises use the term *mandritto*. A backhand cut is referred to as a *reves* in *escrima comun*, while in Bolognese it is called a *riverso*. Note that these terms hold no matter which hand is holding the sword: a cut that travels from right to left made with a sword in the right hand (i.e., a forehand cut) is referred to as a *tajo* or *mandritto*, as is a cut that travels from left to right made with a sword held in the *left* hand. The meaning of *reves* and *riverso* is likewise relative to the hand holding the sword rather than the absolute trajectory of the sword through space. For two-handed weapons, cuts are denominated *tajo*, *mandritto*, *reves*, and *riverso* based on the fencer's dominant hand (e.g., a right-handed fencer who cuts from right to left would be said to be making a *tajo* or *mandritto* even though the cut is forehand with the right hand and backhand with the left hand).

Lastly, the practice of historical European martial arts is constantly evolving, as is our understanding of the treatises from which we work. Any errors in interpreting the words of historical fencing masters that may appear in this book are my own, and do not reflect on the work of the translators or any other person.

It is a Herculean task to translate a technical work into another language, especially when that work is attempting to describe an inherently physical topic (such as swordsmanship) that is best understood

with sword in hand rather than with words on a page. Those who undertake it, and particularly those who graciously gave permission for their work to appear in this book, have my profound thanks. Quotations are used with express permission, and may not be reproduced or transmitted without the permission of the translator or relevant copyright holder.





## PREFACE

I have had the great pleasure of working with Eric on a number of occasions and was thrilled to learn that he had taken on this project and is sharing his knowledge of medieval and Renaissance martial arts with you. As a student, Eric is open and enthusiastic, endeavoring to rise to any challenge put before him. As a coach, Eric displays his caring nature as he supports his students and assists them in their own pursuits. And now, as a writer, Eric brings his joy and love of the Art to the page, sharing them with you.

It is no small task to take on this kind of project, for each discipline he approaches is distinct and highly detailed, and yet, I think that you will find that he distills these broad topics into the essence of each weapon's use. As each chapter unfolds, he discusses the specifications of the weapon itself, defining the length, weight, and makeup of it as an object. He then discusses the context of the weapon's use, drawing connections between the techniques and advice of a variety of medieval authors. Each chapter concludes with the general impression of the armament just discussed, while making connections to the successive weapon.

While I appreciate Eric's diligent approach to this subject in the main text, I find that my favorite feature of this book are the sidebars he

has included to approach the kinds of questions that fans of medieval weaponry often have, but are sometimes reluctant to voice out loud. “Which would win ...?” questions are often the most fun, but frustrating, questions that newer students bring to class. Rather than ignoring or disdaining these topics, he dives into them, allowing us as readers to explore them in a respectful and knowledgeable way.

If you are new to these Arts, I hope that you are able to take your time as you read this volume, and to reflect upon the links that Eric has made between the various medieval masters, but I will forgive you if you find that he has made the topic so approachable that you devour it in one sitting. For those of you who have experience with these Arts, I am confident that you will find his approach to be novel in its whole-hearted clarity, avoiding the trap of unnecessary complexity. And for those of us who teach these Arts, Eric has given us a new way to talk about the Art we love, and we now have a wonderful resource to recommend to our newer students, especially if they have questions about weapons or masters we don’t personally study.

—Jessica Finley, author of *Medieval Wrestling: Modern Practice of a Fifteenth Century Art* and Instructor, Ritterkunst Turnhalle