

MEYER HALBERSTANGEN

- *TRAP HIM IN HIS OWN ACTIONS* -

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PERSONAL PRESENTATION

To begin with I would like to briefly introduce myself. I am the quarterstaff instructor of Gothenburg Historical Fencing School (GHFS) in Sweden, and I am also a member of the Meyer Frei Fechter Guild (MFFG) and the Historical European Martial Arts Coalition (HEMAC). I am also the Chief Editor of HROARR.com and publish most of my research there.

My personal focus is on the teachings of Joachim Meyer and by extension also the context he lived and worked in, as well as the masters that he appears to have studied or be in the same fencing “tree” as, like *Hs. 3227a*, *Sigmund Ringeck*, *Martin Syber*, *Hans Talhoffer*, *Jörg Wilhalm*, *Andres Paurñfeyndt*, *Johannes Leküchner* and *Achille Marozzo*. My main focuses are the longsword, the dusack and the quarterstaff.

This article is an attempt at teaching the very basics underlying Meyer’s quarterstaff fencing, to give a foundation to continue working with his actual techniques from.

The illustrations have been quite crudely cropped and I apologize for it, but hope they will serve well enough to help understand what the text attempts to describe.

ABOUT JOACHIM MEYER

Joachim Meyer was most likely born in 1537, in Basel, Switzerland. His father, Jakob may have been a knifsmith, just as Joachim would later become. Joachim became noted as a burgher when becoming a knifsmith of Straßburg in 1560. If he just had moved to Straßburg or grew up there is currently unclear. He was also a fencing master in this city, teaching and arranging several fechtschule (tournaments) in the 1560s. Interestingly, another Basel-born knifsmith and fencing master named Hans Jakob Meyer would also request to arrange a tournament in Straßburg in 1564. It is currently unclear if this is a relative of Meyer, but it appears to be too much of a coincidence.

Meyer may have had experience of war as all burgher households of his time had to both own weapons and armour, as well as provide a man to serve in the town militia as “police”, firemen, soldiers and honour guards, according to ability. This of course required training, and since times were quite troublesome with constant religious strife and conflict, many men would need to use their training in real life and death situations, both in civilian or military context. Indeed, the nobility we know Meyer was associated with, trained and dedicated his treatise to like *Duke*

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Otto von Solms, Count Johann Casimir, Heinrich von Eberstein and Duke Johann Albrecht of Mecklenburg are known Calvinist proponents often depicted on the battlefields.

He wrote three or four treatises with one currently being lost. The three are the *Duke von Solms treatise* completed in 1560 or -68, a printed treatise in 1570, dedicated to Count Johann Casimir, entitled "*Gründliche Beschreibung der Freyen Ritterlichen und Adeligen Kunst des Fechtens*" and an uncompleted treatise in 1571, dedicated to Duke Heinrich von Eberstein, called the *Rostock Treatise* or Ms Var.82.

The printed 1570 book was reprinted in 1600, 1610 and 1660 and was also copied by *Jakob Sutor* in 1612, and *Theodori Verolinus* in 1679. In this book he directs himself towards *young men* and *experienced soldiers* alike and it teaches the *longsword*, the *dusack*, the "war" *rappier*, *grappling*, *dagger*, *quarterstaff*, *halberd* and *pike*.

Interestingly Meyer appears to be one of the few masters that we clearly can prove to having studied several treatises of earlier fencing masters.

The last so called "Rostock" treatise contains copies of the fencing treatises of *Martin Syber*, *Sigmund Ringeck*, *Martein Hundt felts*, *Jud Lew*, *Andre Liegniczzer* and handles the *longsword*, *armoured fighting*, *fighting on horseback*, *dagger*, *sword & buckler* and *war rappier*.

The dagger illustrations, finally, bear a strong resemblance to the illustrations in the treatise of *Achille Marozzo* and one can be quite certain that at least the illustrators had access to copies of these.

There are several indications that Meyer may have received part of his training in the *Marxbrüder*, which in his time was the only officially recognized fencing guild within the Holy Roman Empire. However, he also appears to have been instrumental in founding of the *Freyfechter* fencing guild and he includes a *Freyfechter Zettel* (List of verses) in his treatise.

In 1570/71 he accepted a position as a fencing master at the court of the *Duke of Mecklenburg* in Schwerin but while travelling there in cold winter February of 1571 he got ill and died shortly after arriving. His last treatise was thus never completed and ends in the middle of a page.

MEYER'S TREATISE OF 1570:

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Returning to Meyer's printed treatise of 1570, we see weapons that are all used on the battlefield of his day; longsword, rapier, dusack, dagger, staff (glaive/spear/partizan), halberd & pike. The longsword is not as popular as it once was, but still carried in some areas and by some soldiers. More importantly it together with the staff taught a foundation for the use of the still not uncommon *Schlachtschwert*, a specialized weapon, like a machine gun or a sniper rifle, used to protect dignitaries, banners and cannons in outnumbered scenarios once the lines have fallen. The Schlachtschwert and similar weapons were used well after Meyer's time almost a 100 years after his death, for just such contexts, including town guard duty.

This treatise teaches staff fencing that is somewhat reminiscent to the Halbenstangen taught by Freyfechter *Andre Paurñfeyndt* in his fencing treatise of 1516, and the *Codex Guelf 83.4 August 8.º* of 1591. However, Paurñfeyndt teaches a more traditional and seemingly less lethal variant of staff fencing with a prominent use of the centre grip, while Meyer clearly prefers a quarterstaff grip and striking while holding the back end with one or two hands. The *Codex Guelf 83.4 August 8.º* is more similar in style, but uses no shared terminology, *Stücken*, or even guards.

Finally, we see identical stances to Meyer depicted in various illustrations by Erhard Schön, Virgil Solis, Hanns Senger, Jost Amman, Martin Pleginck and Jörg Breu. A picture depicting students at the University of Tübingen from late 1500s or early 1600s depict the very same stances taught by Meyer.

For this particular article we are focusing on the quarterstaff, the *Halber Stangen* and to a lesser degree the *Hellebarten* (halberd). The treatise contains 39 Stangen sequences of varying complexity and 20-25 or so regarding Halberd.

The class teaches the core body & weapon mechanics, footwork and the majority of techniques taught by Meyer, with the exception of some wrestling-with-staff techniques.

SPORT OR REAL MARTIAL ART?

For a long time in modern HEMA his teachings have been regarded as a “sportified” version of the *Liechtenauer* tradition by those who focus on the earlier sources, despite Meyer himself clearly directing himself towards *soldiers* and including many lethal and maiming techniques that would never be allowed in a *fechtschul* or other sports contexts, like breaking of arms, thrusting into the face and testicles, striking at hands etc, etc. All weapons that he teaches in his printed treatise are still common on the battlefields of his time, apart from the slightly anachronistic rondel wood dagger portrayed in his treatise. Some techniques that he mentions are also described specifically for the battlefield. Still, large parts of his teachings would likely have been used in a civilian context too, a context where thrusting was considered dishonorable and where striking with the flat was a necessary skill as initially striking with the flat would prove your intent to avoid escalating a violent conflict and therefore could mean the difference between severe punishment and standing clear of blame and guilt.

Most controversial in Meyer’s teachings is the seeming lack of thrusting with the longsword, which can be perceived as a break with the earlier tradition. This is all the more confusing since he thrusts with all other weapons, and does so with the clear intent to maim and kill, but with the longsword, the thrust is only used as a *threat* to cause the opponent to move in a certain fashion so you can attack him in a created “opening”.

However, in my belief, there is a *pedagogical* and *practical* reason for this, closely tied to the structure of teaching in the Renaissance fencing guilds. We do not have full details for how this structure was in the Marxbrüder or the Freyfechter guilds, but the English *Company of Maisters of the Noble Science of Defense*, who were strongly inspired by the German guilds and provably used near identical ceremonies etc, follow Meyer’s treatise exactly, starting with the longsword, continuing with the dusack, rapier, dagger and ending with the polearms. This is also the general structure of Austrian Freyfechter *Andre Paurñfeyndt’s* treatise of 1516. I would suggest this structure is tied to *concerns for safety of the students*, so the safer weapons are used first, i.e. the *longsword* which can be better controlled with two hands than a single-hand sword, then the *dusack* which has a safe wooden training sword to use. - These two are again in Meyer’s time the two most popular weapons in his region. Then he moves on to the, in his time, increasingly more popular *war rapier*, then the *dagger* and finally the most dangerous and hard to learn of them all; the *polearms* - a weapon type that has little civilian use apart from town guard duty.

This structure makes sense, since no master in their right mind would ask two beginners to attempt to stab each other in the face straight away. That would leave him with precious few students very quickly.

It has also been suggested that the longsword is no longer in use by Meyer's time, but this is provably wrong. It was still commonly carried both by some civilians and soldiers and can be seen alongside of the large two-hand *Schlachtschwert* in battlefield illustrations well into the 30 Years War. And the Montante is taught for war and civic duty as late as in 1651 by Dom Diogo Gomes de Figueiredo. It is also my belief that the staff was used to train the use of the *Schlachtschwert*, a weapon that for military purposes served the same function as the halberd and which is commonly seen in contemporary depictions used with the left hand leading, just as the staff and halberd are taught.

Regardless, while Meyer *thrusts* rather rarely with the longsword, he does turn the *winding* (Winden) into a great art by teaching many, many ways of using the bind for controlling the opponent's blade and striking from the bind.

Finally, Meyer adds a whole layer of *tactics* and strategies, working with *psychology* and *mind games*, something which is often missing from earlier treatises. In many ways, it is reminiscent in parts of Meyer's near contemporaries *Myamoto Musashi's* famous Book of Five rings or *George Silver's* books on fencing, only with techniques and terminology more clearly explained and exemplified.

His tactical and strategical advice includes the following:

- ***Attack first***
 - Take the initiative and don't wait for the opponent to attack you. It is better to force him to respond to what you do than the opposite.

- ***There are three different types of strikes: Provoking - Displacing - Hitting.***
 - Most exchanges include at least two of these, in any order. Some strikes displace and hit at the same time. Others just perform a single of these functions at a time, but can be used in all three ways. Provoking is a way of controlling your opponent by giving him an idea about what is "right" to do. That way you are ahead of your opponent already and can treat him in whatever way you like.

- ***Transform a strike into a thrust and a thrust into a strike***
 - It is quicker and better to move the shortest, or the quickest way. From a strike it is often better to keep the point in line and thrust from the inside or the outside.

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However, from a failed thrust it is often better to use the momentum of the opponent's parry to strike around, especially for one handed weapons.

- **Work from Corner Guards and counter in flow**

- While it is true that you should strike quickly and effectively, it is also true that you should also fight in a flow, striking and parrying in one continuous movement. The corner guards are defined by fully extending and you pass from one guard to another as you work your opponent. This leads to circular striking with one or two hands as you break your opponent's attacks or as yours are broken. Every time you or the opponent breaks an attack you will end up in a guard. Guards are crossroads where you can change direction and on your way there you observe the opponent and decide where to turn next.

- ***If he tends to strike wide: Void and counterattack with quick strikes or thrusts.***

- For opponents who strike overly hard and wide; just step out of range and as his staff is over-extended, then attack quickly to whatever body part you can reach.

- ***If he tends to void and counterattack: Provoke and feint.***

- Likewise if you face an opponent who likes to fight like the above, then instead work with provocations; threaten with thrusts and strikes in, or slightly out of range to force the opponent to move in a certain fashion, thus revealing a new opening that he will find it hard to defend quickly, which you then attack. Both Silver and Musashi speak of this too, although from slightly different perspectives.

- ***Withdraw with a threat***

- Following from the above you also have to make sure that you not only bind your opponent's weapon after a successful attack, but also that you withdraw in a manner that discourages the opponent from attacking you, either with extended staff, a thrust or a strike.

- ***Don't do things you can't do in a real, dangerous situation.***

- Meyer states that we all think differently and thus fight differently. There simply isn't a single best fighting style and there are as many styles as there are fighters. But not only that, he also discourages us from using techniques that are difficult for us in a situation where we need to rely on them, since not all techniques are for everyone. Our bodies, lack of training etc will hinder us in executing some of them properly, which means it would be suicidal to use them in a real fight.

SAFETY ROUTINES & SPARRING

First of all bear in mind that the staff is a *sharp* weapon. It hasn't been dulled down, lightened or made safe in any way and no protective gear will keep you safe from injury. Only control can do that. For that reason all my staff workshops are started out with both parties thrusting and striking progressively harder at their partner's head, of course with the opponent wearing a fencing mask, until their partner says "stop". This way both will learn both the power of the staff and what is a reasonable level of force to use for beginner's training.

I strongly suggest you do not add sparring until after a few years of training, where you have built enough experience and control to not permanently injure each other. However, when you are ready for it then I suggest you try the same approach to sparring that we use in our training. We separate between two forms of sparring: *Sparring* and *Free Fencing*. In the former you are allowed to strike only against opponent's staff and can only thrust and strike lightly at the body. In Free Fencing however you are allowed to use all techniques but you are primarily supposed to put up threats to which the opponent has to respond correctly. Consequently, if the opponent misses his parry, then you need to be able to halt your attack. Neither forms are slow or light, but they have a difference in individual intent and purpose when sparring. More on these two forms can be read here:

www.hroarr.com/free-fencing-exercises

THE STAFF & GRIPPING IT

The parts of the staff

Basically the staff is treated both like a long-hilted sword and as a halberd. It is divided into four different sections:

- The furthestmost quarter – Used for striking and parrying
- The quarter near the hand – Used for binding and controlling the opponent's staff
- The two quarters in between the hands – Used for parrying and shoving the opponent or is staff around.
- The bit behind the rear hand – Used for wrenching the opponent or his staff (The length of this varies from a quarter to a hand's length)

Furthermore, for ease of communication, and also for preparing the teaching of the halberd, the staff is said to have a short and long edge, corresponding with the hook and the edge of the halberd.

Gripping the staff and changing grip

For a right-handed person the staff is held with the left hand leading. This enables you to better control the staff in single-hand strikes and thrusts as you will keep your dominant hand at the back end.

The leading hand can be held open or closed and the thumbs on both hands can be held both forwards or backwards although not both held in opposite directions. This gives you three variants;

- Both thumbs forwards
- Thumbs pointing at each other
- Both thumbs aimed backwards

The staff can also be held in the centre at somewhat more than shoulder's width, but much more commonly held gripped with a hand's width left at the back end and the leading arm extended almost fully, although slightly bent. Leading hand grip changes are usually done when rotating the staff back at your left side with the hands high behind your left shoulder.

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ROTATION & LOCKING POINTS

Unlike a sword a staff is distinctly rotated around specific *rotation* points. These points are in the rear hand, or in between your hands, depending on the action and what stance you are moving from and to. So, striking from e.g. Left *Oberhut* into *Mittelhut* means you only rotate the staff in the rear hand, pulling the hand back from your chest to your flank/armpit. On the other hand parrying from *Nebenhut* with left foot leading or from *Steürhut* into *Mittelhut* means you rotate it in between your hands, as you move both hands, pulling the rear hand back to your armpit.

You also use different *locking points* to control your staff easier, thus being able to stop in guard, despite the weight and inertia of the weapon. These locking points are the left and right shoulders, the right flank, the left hip and you use them by extending your arms fully and letting your hands come to rest at your left hip or right flank, depending on your action.

BODY & WEAPON MECHANICS

Note: *These movements are first practiced without staff to more easily focus on correct body movement only. You can of course also practice this with staff in hand.*

The basic stance is to stand narrowly with your left foot leading, in a broad, low stance. Your right foot is aimed roughly at 90 degrees from the left and your weight is shifted slightly forwards. The left knee is above the leading foot, not in front or behind. Back is normally kept straight or even slightly leaned back, as in left *Oberhut*. Shoulders are angled *slightly* to the side, with the left shoulder straight or almost straight forward and the right almost at six o'clock.

Weight is constantly shifted from back and forth from centre to forwards or backwards-weighted stance. This involves a particular twisting motion of hips and shoulders, which also requires particular movements with the feet, where the leading foot twists on the balls of the foot to 10 o'clock from 12 o'clock and back, and the rear foot is raised on its toes from its 90 degree angle, and back.

This particular movement with shifting of weight is practiced the best with the use of the cross cutting in *Kreutzhauw* and *Treiben*, where you start in the Left *Oberhut* and cut diagonally down with the long edge, coming through into right *Oberhut* (equivalent to *Ochs*) and from there cut down with the short edge. This will be exemplified more in depth later.

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You can also practice this movement without staff, instead letting your left arm strike freely in a cross. For this to work, you need to twist towards your right side as you strike to the right, ending up looking over your left shoulder before twisting around towards your left side and the left strike. Following that you instead twist all the way, raising your right heel so your foot rests on the toes, while twisting the left foot to roughly 10-11 o'clock, twisting your right shoulder and hips as far as possible.

Using this twisting motion your staff fencing becomes easier and more natural and thus gives you both more power and speed without unnecessary drain of energy and stamina. It also prepares for a balanced and controlled step forwards.

FOOTWORK

Note: *Usually when I teach this we practice footwork without staff, but with the leading hand aimed straight forwards for proper chest/shoulder alignment. You can of course also practice this with staff in hand.*

Remember to keep your back straight as you move so you can stop at any time in good control. Watch your point/leading hand!

Don't move your hips up as you step forwards, but maintain the same height throughout the movement!

Gathering steps

Move your rear foot near your leading foot and then step forwards with your leading foot. This can be done with both short and long, leaping steps and is as fast as passing steps, but with your whole body aligned in a single stance. Repeat.

Retreating

Retreat with gathering steps, but instead start by moving your leading foot back, before moving the rear foot back.

Passing sidestep to the right

Step out broadly forwards and to the right side with your rear foot and follow with your left so you end up in the stance you started in. Repeat.

Retreat with gathering steps.

Sidestep to the left

1. Make a small step to the left somewhat forwards with your leading left foot and follow with the right.

2. Step to the left with your right foot leaning somewhat to the left and then follow with the leading foot, also moving it towards your left side.

Retreat with gathering steps.

Stepping behind yourself

Move your rear foot forwards and somewhat to the left *behind* yourself without twisting your upper body, then without stepping twist your upper body 360 degrees so you come forwards but now leading with the right foot. Make a passing step with the now rear left foot so you return to your initial stance. Repeat.

Retreat with gathering steps.

Start with the *right* foot leading and repeat the above only *mirrored*.

Repeat the above but instead of stepping forward with the rear foot, start by *retreating* with the leading foot.

STEPPING IN DEFENSE AND ATTACKS

This topic deserves a special mentioning as the timing of the hand and foot in these two different types of action is quite different.

If you are *attacked* then you have a few different choices for stepping.

1. Don't step at all, but lean back away from the incoming attack
2. Make a gathering step backwards, putting your leading foot close to your rear foot as you parry, and then step forwards with your leading foot again as you counter-attack.
3. Make a gathering step forwards or to the side with your rear foot without moving your body forwards, as you parry and then complete your stepping by moving your leading foot forwards as you counter-attack

All of these actions mean you will bind the staves with your feet gathered at roughly the same distance to your opponent.

4. Alternately you can also gather your feet backwards, moving your leading foot to your rear foot as you parry and then step back with your rear foot as you make a threatening counter-attack not really intended to hit.

However, if you wish to *attack* instead then the actual attack is timed to an extended step with either foot, meaning the attack is *completed* with the final step, regardless of if it is a thrust or a strike. If the first attack is parried then you instantly gather your feet with a bind or as you let the staff fall or rise, and complete your attack with another full step. This can of course also be done *deceptively* with an attack made slightly out of range, to *provoke* a parry.

GUARDS & GUARD TRANSFORMATIONS

Guards + Guard transformations

All guards are shown at the end of this chapter.

Oberhut – Both sides

This guard is asymmetric on the two sides. Both variants are the *upper transition guards* where you change from one side to another.

On your left, you hold the point almost straight up, slightly back, with your left hand and foot leading, the rear hand over your heart, and your back leaning slightly back, weight centered over your hips. It is the equivalent of the longsword guard *Tag*.

On your right side you hold the staff horizontally above and by the side of your head, the point aimed at the opponent's face and your leading hand near your temple. It is the equivalent of the longsword guard *Ochs*.

Mittelhut (Gerader Versatzung/Feldthut)

This guard is held with the leading hand extended and the rear hand at the flank near the armpit with the point aimed at the opponent's face.

It is the equivalent of the longsword guard *Langenort* and it is the guard you pass through as you strike down from *Tag*. Meyer also calls it *Gerader Versatzung*, which more refers to binding the opponent's weapon horizontally. With a halberd it is also called *Feldthut*.

Unterhut & Steürhut

These guards are held leaning forward with the leading shoulder over the knee. *Unterhut* is where you end up as you strike from *Tag*, through *Mittelhut*, pulling the rear end of the staff into your armpit and letting your point rest in the middle or to one of the sides, down to the ground.

Unterhut is the equivalent to the longsword guard *Alber*.

Steürhut is where you end up as you start in *Right Oberhut* and pull the point down to your left side towards *Nebenhut*. You can also come into it e.g. from *Unterhut*, by simply raising your rear hand out of your armpit forwards and up, thus protecting you well behind the staff. It can also be done by just raising both arms somewhat and then turning around 180 degrees without moving the staff.

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Steürhut is the equivalent of the longsword guard *Schrankhut*.

"Wechselhut" & Nebenhut

These two guards are the *lower transition guards* where you change from one side to another.

Wechselhut isn't named by Meyer in the polearms section, but the mechanics are identical to that of his other weapons so it makes sense to use the term, not least since the last chapters of the book are somewhat random and incomplete in various ways.

The guard is held by shifting the weight back onto the rear leg, aiming the point so it forms a more or less like-sided triangle on the ground with your feet and your left arm extended almost straight backwards and your rear arm crooked behind you and up. From here you can choose either to halt and go back up again, or continue swinging back and around so you come back to *Right Oberhut* again. It should be as natural and easy as possible, like shoveling snow.

This stance is also used for baiting the opponent into attacking your flank.

Nebenhut can be done in two ways. The first and most common way, is to move from *Steürhut*, keeping your right hand in place, but pulling the leading left hand back so it rests on or near your left hip, extending the point behind you and down. You have to open up the palm of your left hand to be able to do this, letting the staff rest on the soft top part between your thumb and index finger. Resting on the balls of your feet your left foot twists and is aimed at ca 10 o'clock while you raise your rear heel so the rear foot rests on your toes, thus enabling you to extend your right shoulder forwards properly.

The other variant of *Nebenhut* can be learned by doing the above and then simply looking over your right shoulder so you see the point of your staff at the corner of your right eye. This means you can fight in two directions using the same guard. The latter version is also used for baiting the opponent into attacking your flank.

Special "Verführen" (Seducing) guards

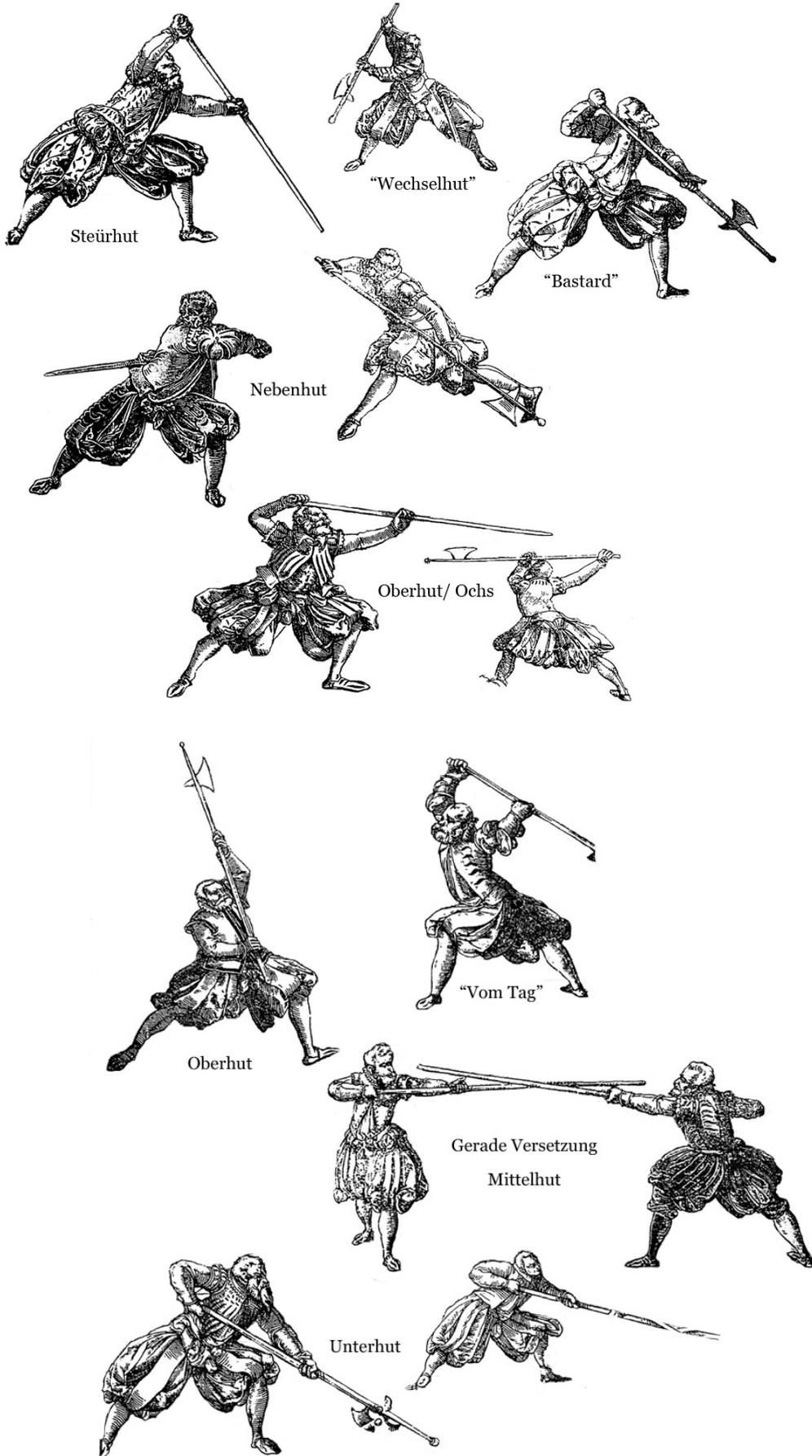
As described above, *Nebenhut* and *Wechselhut* are both commonly used, alongside of *Oberhut* and *Unterhut* to bait and lure the opponent into attacking an opening that is exposed with these guards. Exaggerating these openings slightly can trigger your opponent into attacking them and you are thus in control of the events.

Multiple opponents

Nebenhut and *Steürhut* are particularly interesting guards in that they are done quite differently on the left and right side, but at the same time are identical on each side with the slight difference of looking one way or the complete other, meaning you can fight opponents coming from complete opposite directions using these two guards.

Halberd guards

Finally we have two guards that are particular for the halberd. Neither are named, but they are both shown in the illustrations and they are the equivalent to the Italian *Bastard guard*" where you reverse your rear hand and hold the staff diagonally down in front of your chest, and the *Hanging Tag*, with both arms raised above your head and the halberd hanging down behind you. This could also be seen as one variant of *Steürhut*.



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The Kreutzhauw & Treiben

These two concepts both have a *training* and a *combat* aspect to their application. They can be used to drive the opponent back, to threaten him and cause him to make mistakes or turn defensive, but they also train you to become *more dynamic, stronger* and *more capable of changing an initiated action into something else*, even with such a heavy and powerful weapon as a halberd.

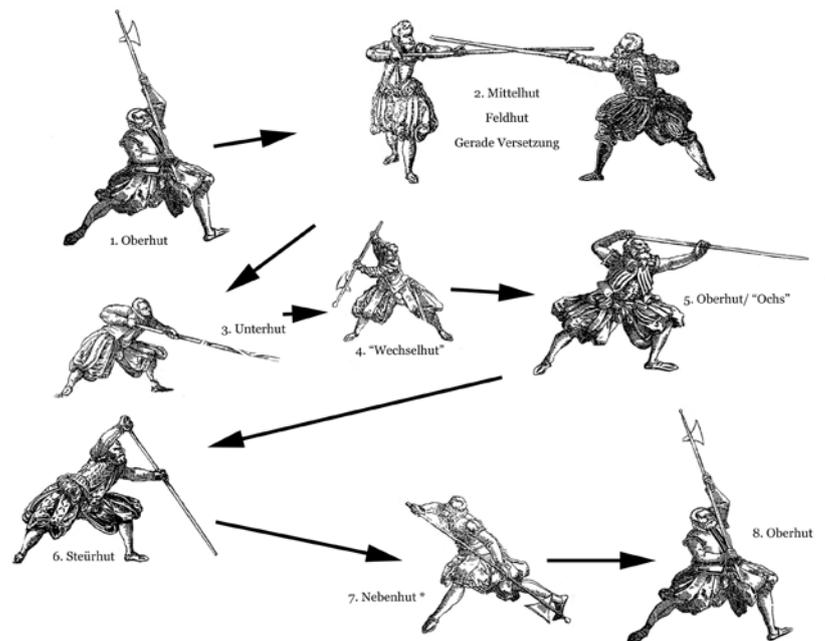
These concepts are the key to learning how to work with flow from all guards in all situations.

Treiben – Diagonally

This is simply cutting/striking down and up again from *Tag* to *Unterhut*, back and forth. It can be done on both sides. If the opponent strikes or thrusts in while you are doing this, then you simply strike out the opponent's incoming attack.

Kreutzhauw – Crosswise

Here you strike from the corner guards of *Oberhut*, via *Mittelhut* into *Unterhut*, then naturally let your staff continue by your side through *Wechselhut* or *Nebenhut* (depending on what side you strike on), thus changing sides and coming through to *Oberhut* on the other side. The sequence can of course also be reversed so instead of striking down, you strike up. Just make sure it feels easy.



"Don't fight your weapon, fight your opponent."

ATTACKS

Attacks are done in two primary ways; *striking* and *thrusting*. Both ends of the staff can be used for both types of attacks, but naturally the forward part is most commonly used for attacking, displacing and parrying.

Schlagen (*Striking*)

Normally, you never cross your arms when striking. The leading hand slides from its strong centre grip used for parrying and displacing, towards the rear hand for more flexibility and power. This means you need to have an open and dynamic grip with the leading hand in particular.

Striking is often also done with one hand, as the leading hand lets go of its grip temporarily. Hirnschlag (Brain Blow) and Schöffereistreich (Crest Stroke) are two examples of named single-hand strikes, done to each side respectively.

There is no striking to the opponent from below, only *Reissen* (*Rising*) with short or long edge, to *parry* or *displace* the opponent's weapon.

Striking can be done diagonally, vertically or horizontally and commonly is combined with thrusting in more or less complex patterns. A feinted thrust that is parried can be quickly transformed into a strike and a parried strike can quickly be transformed into a thrust, just as a parry of a strike can be transformed into a thrust or a strong displacement of a strike can continue through to a counter-strike.

Die Rose (The Rose)

This is a technique that bridges all weapons and both striking and thrusting. It is similar to *Duplieren* in concept and also to the combination of *Krumphauw* – *Schielhauw* and *Krumphauw* – *Scheitelhauw*. Finally it is also somewhat similar to the *Stürtzhauw* both mechanically and conceptually.

It starts as a displacing strike from a side guard, but is transformed into a thrust through a “flowery” motion in the shape of the petals of a rose (In Meyer's time a 5-petaled flower only, see the article the Rose & the Pentagram on HROARR.com).

Meyer names it performed on the right side, but describes it, without actually calling it a *Rose*, on the left side too. Both are the principally the same though and pass through the guards via parts of the *Kreutzhauw* described earlier.

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Stossen (Thrusting)

Thrusting can be done in two ways, primarily; so called *static* and *sliding* thrusts.

Static thrusts

With static thrusts the leading hand grips the staff firmly at about the middle, assuring a solid grip and good leverage and control. This works well in armour or at close distance. However, it also leaves you vulnerable to long-range attacks with sliding thrusts.

Sliding thrusts

Sliding thrusts are done with an open leading hand and with the rear hand pushing the staff forwards through the leading hand, like a pool cue, but with a different leading grip. The rear hand usually comes straight from the right arm pit, but can also thrust in slightly from above, from the *Right Oberhut*, or even from the left side of your chest as with the complex technique *Die Rose* (The Rose). It gives you good reach and a lot of thrusting power at the expense of control, as you are very vulnerable if you are displaced or parried. Still, it is the most common attack used.

With this we leave the basics and come to the more complex and subtle techniques.

COMPLEX TECHNIQUES & PRINCIPLES

All the following techniques have been broken out of Meyer's stücke and grouped together according to the requirements of distance and strength of the bind they are tied to.

Forward-most part of the staff and longest range.

Here we work with the forward most part of the staff, the last foot or two of the staff. This is the part you primarily strike and parry with, and it is also the part you use to bind at long distance, in *Zufechten*.

Schlagen (Striking)

This is a simple strike from any guard ending in either *Mittelhut* or one of the corner guards of *Oberhut* or *Unterhut*.

This type of strike is normally aimed at the opponent's weapon and commonly do not involve sliding the leading hand. It is also always done with both hands gripping the staff.

Umbschlagen (Striking Around)

While this commonly means striking through the opponent's staff so you continue via your guards into another strike from the same side at the same or another angle, it can also just mean striking large circular strikes.

This type of strike commonly has the leading hand sliding back towards the rear even as the forward part of the staff moves forward in the first displacing or threatening strike.

A particular variant of this *striking around* is similar to Jogo do Pau, where you from a straight or hanging bind step forward behind yourself with your rear foot and then simply unwind your upper body for a quick 360-degree strike from the side or above.

The following techniques mostly work from the bind, i.e. *Gerader Versatzung (Straight Parrying)*

Bleiben (*Remaining*)

Staying in the bind with your staves connecting at the forward part of the staves you can either have a strong or a weak bind. The rear hand is always at your armpit to begin with and you lead with your left hand and foot.

Weak bind

If your opponent gives you a *weak bind*, then you can do the following technique:

Rucken (*The Flicking*)

With a maintained bind raise your rear end of the staff somewhat out to the side. As you snap it back you press your forward part out over to the side of your opponent's staff in a spiraling motion forwards as you make a gathering step and finish with a step of your leading foot, thus flicking his staff powerfully to the side with an exponentially more effective pressing, and thrust in straight into his face.

This is a difficult technique both to use and to practice, but you will "feel" when it is right, and notice quite clearly. Keep in mind though that this won't work at all against a strong bind. You have to catch the opponent off-guard.

Mechanically *Ruck* is somewhat similar to the longsword *Krumphauw* and *Duplieren*.

Strong bind:

Most commonly, your opponent will resist you with power or deception. If he is pressing hard then you can use the following techniques. You can also create a strong bind by causing your opponent to feel threatened, for instance by making a faked thrust.

Trücken (*The Pressing*)

Trücken is superficially very similar to *Ruck*. From the bind you throw the back end out and up towards your side so your point is aimed somewhat to the side of your opponent.

Simultaneously you drop your whole body low, leaning somewhat forward, so you are protected underneath of your staff with your arms above your head somewhat forwards. The opponent's point will still be aimed straight towards you, but above you.

Snap the back end down hard towards your flank & armpit as you make a gathering step and complete your step with your leading foot as you thrust straight in. Thus your opponent's staff falls by your side as you thrust into his face.

Schnappen (*The Snapping*)

Schnappen with a staff is similar to how it is done with a longsword: As your opponent presses hard against your staff you just give in to the pressure and use it to power and speed up a circular strike, commonly coming from above. As you give in you slide your leading hand back towards the back end of the staff, close to your rear hand. As you complete the strike you then pull back into *Mittelhut* again, thus protected.

Zucken (*The Pulling*)

Zucken too uses the power of the opponent's hard pressing against him, although differently. Here you do not let it power your own attack, but just give in and lift your staff out of the way so the sudden lack of resistance causes the opponent to overextend his staff. This can be simply done by just raising your staff towards *Left Oberhut* and then quickly striking down along the same line towards the opponent's staff or arms and then finishing him off with a strike to the face.

Umbzucken (*The Pulling Around*)

Umbzucken is similar to *Zucken*, but instead of striking down again along the same line you pulled back through, you instead strike along another line, commonly to the other side.

Durchwechseln (*The Changing Through*)

This too is a technique recognizable from the longsword. It is a very common technique and is very important to deceive the opponent with *pulled thrusts*. It relies on the opponent being fooled into overextending with a failed parry.

1. *Simple Durchwechseln.*

From a strong bind you drop your point by raising your rear end somewhat, so you can move underneath his staff and thrust in on the other side of his staff, preferably leaning out to your side protected behind your staff.

You can also do this with a *Ruck* or a *Trück* from the bind first.

2. *Nachstoss* (*Counter thrust*)

The counter to the above is to thrust straight in as soon as your opponent drops his point to go underneath your staff.

3. *Durchwechseln with Ausschlag* (*Striking away*)

The above can be utilized to deceive the opponent by making a faked *Durchwechseln*, dropping your point and waiting for the opponent to counterthrust and as he does so, you strike his staff to the side and complete your *Durchwechseln* with a thrust into his face or chest.

4. *Double Durchwechseln*

If the opponent tries the above, then you can just drop your point down, causing him to miss striking your staff away, and thus you make a *Double Durchwechseln*, thrusting in on the other side.

And so it continues, with countless of variations...

Mid-forward part of the staff and somewhat closer range OR in between the hands and close range.

With these techniques we are working at or moving *into* somewhat closer distance, i.e. the *Krieg*. You control the opponent's staff with the part of the staff that is close to your leading hand, giving you strong leverage and control at the cost of distance.

Absetzen, (Displacing)

Here, *Absetzen* simply means to displace the opponent's staff. *Absetzen* in itself offers no threat to the opponent, but sets things up for further actions. It can also control the opponent's staff so you can thrust in as you lean out to the side safe behind your staff.

Winden (Winding)

Following *Absetzen*, you can wind the forward part of your staff over to the outside of your opponent's so you can control it better. From there you can either strike or thrust with the back end, thrust in with the point, or strike in with the forward part, depending on your winding.

Überschiessen Stoss (Overshooting Thrust)

From a bind at the furthestmost part you make a passing step with your rear foot without actually moving much forward. Simultaneously you raise the point of your staff upwards making sure you don't push it too far to the side. As you complete your stepping with your left foot, you raise the back end letting your point come over and down on the outside of the opponent's staff and complete the action by stabbing him in the gut or balls.

This technique needs to be done quickly and aggressively to be successful. Originally, this is a halberd technique.

Close range

Here we step into even closer range at a distance where we can use the staff for wrenching and grappling.

Gesperren & Streich or Wirffen (Barring & striking or wrenching)

The following technique can be done in two ways. It is related to Ringeck's *Umbschnappen* with a longsword. The right side version is originally taught with a halberd, hooking on the halberd head.

On the left side

Start with a furthestmost bind from your left towards your right. Make sure that your opponent is pressing hard in the bind. If not, then provoke him into doing so by making small stabbings, stomping, shouting or whatever is needed to get him to press hard.

As the opponent presses out to the side, you give in somewhat and raise your back end up, sliding your rear hand towards the middle of the staff. Simultaneously you make a passing step with your right foot forwards, keeping your staff at your left side between you and your opponent's staff. Attempt to strike him in the face with the back end diagonally from above.

If the strike misses, then let the back end continue towards your left over the opponent's staff and hook it down so you control your opponent's staff. As you hook it down, you let the forward end come back up again in a wheeling motion by your left side, striking in straight from above to the opponent's head. Make sure to not lose control over the opponent's staff with your back end as you do so.

On the right side

Start by first making a *Durchwechseln*. As the opponent presses your point to the side, then shoot the back end underneath your left elbow while raising both arms up over your head, dropping the point by your right side so you are protected behind your staff. Do this together with a gathering step.

Complete the stepping with your left foot while simultaneously throwing your back end to the right, over the opponent's staff and hook down hard so you control his staff and let the forward end come back up again in a wheeling motion, striking in straight from above to the opponent's head. With a halberd you can hook the back end on the opponent's halberd head and pull.

Should he resist the barring with your back end successfully, then you can step behind him with your right leg and throw him over it using the back end of your staff.

Versetzen & Stossen (*Displacing & Thrusting*)

This is a counter to strikes straight from above and in particular single-hand strikes like the *Schöffereich* or the *Hirnschlag*.

Assuming you stand in *Unterhut*, *Mittelhut* or *Steürhut* you raise your staff up and move closer so you can parry on between your hands. To keep the leading hand safer you may wish to open it up so no part of the hand grips around the staff and you parry with “flat” hand behind your staff. As the strike is thus voided, you drop your point a bit so his staff falls by your side, and then quickly thrust in from above to his face or chest.

Stangen Nehmen (*The Staff Taking*)

This is a technique commonly done with longsword in *shortened* or *half-sword*, taught by e.g. *Ringeck*.

Starting from a bind with reversed leading hand (your thumbs pointing at each other), you lean in, while pushing the back end low and forwards and opening the palm of your leading hand up so you can grip the opponent’s staff from underneath. With a passing step with your right foot, continue moving the back end forwards and out to the opponent’s right side underneath his staff, while maintaining your grip on his and your own staff with your left hand.

As the staves come horizontal, you hook the crook of your right arm behind your opponent’s elbow from underneath, pressing up. As you do this, you then press down on both staves with your left hand while making a passing step with your left foot, simultaneously raising your right arm completing a full wheeling motion with the staves, thus disarming him. Complete the whole action by making a triangle step with your rear foot so you face the opponent and can stab him in the back.

Should he be able to resist as you try to raise your right arm and disarm him, then you can hook your back end from your left over his arms and chest, behind his staff, and step behind him with your right leg, so you can throw him over it using your back end.

Deceiving techniques

The following techniques and concepts are all *deceiving* and seduce or fool the opponent into *attacking you in a particular way* so you thus can control him, or they cause him to *defend in a particular way* so you can attack another opening.

Rosen

The Rose is deceptive in that it looks like a wide strike but contains a quick thrust and that no one expects.

Fehlen Streich

The Failed Strike is deceptive in that it causes the opponent to move to defend in a particular way

Verzucken Stoss

The Pulled Thrust is deceptive in that it causes the opponent to move to defend in a particular way

Verführen

Seducing can be done with your weapon and your body, exposing yourself, or with sound, as in shouting or stomping into the ground. It can be done with your attitude, fooling your opponent into thinking you are overly aggressive or defensive, even foolish or a coward.

Dürchwechseln

The Changing Through is deceptive in that it causes the opponent to move to defend in a particular way.

Umbwenden

The Turning Around, lures the opponent into attacking your back or flank as they are exposed when you turn around into the *Wechselhut* or *Nebenhut*. Thus you can counter him with specific techniques for those stances.

Übergehen

The Stepping Over means you cross your legs as you make a passing step backwards with your leading foot or a passing step forwards with your rear foot *behind* yourself. Provided you have a bind you deceptively haven't stepped forward, but you can spin around with your upper body and strike quick and extremely hard from the side or above.

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Treiben

The Driving is meant to instill caution and fear in the opponent by aggressively striking back and forth in front of you as you step forward. The pattern you strike in is then suddenly broken and you attack from another angle or with a completely different type of attack.

Stangen Nehmen

The Staff Taking is deceptive for obvious reasons. You close distance quickly and grab the opponent's weapon thus making him defenseless and confused.

FINAL WORDS

This has been a very simple introduction to some of the basic principles underlying Joachim Meyer's quarterstaff fencing. For further learning I highly recommend you to get yourself a copy of *Dr. Jeffrey L. Forgeng's* excellent translation into English of Meyer's 1570 treatise. A 2nd print has at the time of writing just been released.

I would also like to thank *Dr. Forgeng* in particular for his incredible work on this translation.

A huge thanks also to my partner in crime; *Mattias Moberg*. Thanks for putting up with my bullying tendencies that pop up when teaching.

A warm thank you to each and every one of you who have taken part of my classes. It is always truly a memory for life and I will be forever grateful to you. I probably learn more from you than you do from me.

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Please don't hesitate to send me any questions you may have regarding this article or the associated workshops. You can reach me at contact@hroarr.com

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