

An Anonymous Dueling Shield Treatise

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Long shield and mace combat from
the Peter Falkner Fechtbuch - c. 1495

Manuscript KK 5126, held in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, Austria, is a late medieval fencing manuscript, a copy of the illustrated 15th century codex (CGM 1507, Bayerisches Staatsbibliothek) by the Bavarian fencing master Paulus Kal, now in Munich. However, the illustrated portion is far inferior in its artwork and is missing the original's captions. The manuscript is more noteworthy for what follows the Kal material: the last third or so of the manuscript includes German language fencing texts culled from various sources.

Among the treatises there are anonymous commentaries on the verse epitome of the German fencing grandmaster Johannes Liechtenauer (derived mainly from materials in other manuscripts), the works of Masters Martin Huntfeltz, Ott the Jew, and Andres Lignitzer, and some material unique to this compendium.

The unique works are an anonymous poleaxe treatise (translated and interpreted in my 2010 title, [In Saint George's Name](#)), plus two separate works regarding the long shield – a large, exotic dueling weapon used either solo, or in concert with a mace or sword. One of these gives instructions and rules for such a duel – a subject for another day and another article. It is the first, a short series of techniques for fighting with the shield, that I will treat here. Despite its brevity, the treatise, comprising six techniques with an introductory paragraph, is fascinating for a number of reasons.

While primarily focusing on what happens when the club-like maces are used with the shield, the *Franconian Rite* version of the duel, it also (briefly) mentions the use of the sword, a feature of the *Swabian Rite* duel. Other points of interest:

Blows with the shield, the *Oberhau* (Stroke from Above) and *Unterhau* (Stroke from Below) appear in the first passage. This is yet more evidence that when we see the German suffix or word 'hau', we should not think "cutting blow"; rather, this is used across the tradition to describe any kind of 'chopping' action, whether or not the weapon is edged.

An interesting feature of these duels, attested in the first and fourth techniques, is that multiple maces are available, upon request, from the officials. A combatant may throw his mace at his opponent, and then ask for another one. It is unclear here how many

may be requested before the supply runs out. In any case, the casting of a weapon is a time-honored feature in duels, dating from Classical Antiquity.

The second technique, if my translation guesswork is correct, seems to involve striking one of the often nasty-looking barbs that are frequently illustrated on large dueling shields. This is used to lever the opponent's shield away, thereby exposing him to further attack. This same idea is repeated in the third technique, only now we're told to step on the bottom of the shield to move it.

The fourth technique finds the combatant having exhausted his supply of maces. Now the shield must do double duty as defense and offense. A hooking action with the shield, again exposing the opponent, is advised.

Technique five finds both antagonists without maces, and so the author advises the reader to work with the point of his shield, using an adaptation of the winding or turning actions, one weapon in contact with the other, that so much a trademark in German treatises on the longsword.

The desperate struggle of a judicial duel finds the fighter sans mace and shield in the sixth technique, so it advises the use of *Mortgriff*, or "Murder Grips" – very unpleasant strikes to pressure points and joint destructions. The combatant can use his feet to attack the shins or knees, the hands to throw the opponent or injure sensitive areas of the body. The final item of this grim roster is the "Sun Pointer" (*Sunen Zaigenn*); this technique originates with Liechtenauer's mounted combat, but the 15th century saw applications of it spreading throughout the system. In the technique, the opponent's head is wrenched around, so he can see the sun, and then used to throw him over.

Combat with the Long Shield

KK 5126 ff. 127r – 127v

f. 127r

[...]

*Jtem also schick dich in dem lanngen schilt lern im anfang den obern vnd
denn vnthern haw vnd vntten vnd oben wol lernst an pintn vnd in denn her
nach geschribenn stuckenn wirstu lernnen die seytenn reysenn*

Item, do thus with the long shield: learn to deliver the *Oberhau* and *Unterhau* and learn to bind well below and above, and in the techniques described hereafter you will learn the side wrenching.

Jtem das erst stuck schick dich hinder den schilt also dastu ein swert oder kolbm hast dw ein swert wo dw in plossenn sichst so slach oder würf da hin vnd Hays dir deinen grieswartl ein anndern cholbenn gebn

Item, do thus the first technique behind the shield if you have a sword or mace: if you have a sword strike whatever opening you see; or cast [the mace] and call your marshal to give you another mace.

[[Jtem schick dich mit dem schilt vnd mit dem cholben nachtet zw im vnd sch // eub mit dem ort vom cholben auf sein parcz schilcz so magstu in plos Jndes slach oder stich

Item, do this with the shield and with mace near to him and shoot with the point of the mace to his shield's barb [?] so that he must expose himself; immediately strike or thrust.

Jtem schick dich mer nachtet zw im vnd drit mit ainem fues an ein ortt seins schilcz also wirt er ganncz plos so slach nach dem lem zw denn glidernn

Item, do this nearer to him and step with a foot on a point of his shield so that he is completely exposed, then strike to lame the wrist.

Jtem ob dw die cholben al vernuczest vnd dw frey mit dem schilt stuenst vnd er auch frey mit dem seinen stet so besich ob dw im sein schilt vnder gen mochst bey dem ort vnd reys vrbering an dich so nymbstu ymen wurff von dir pald vnd arbeit mit deinen schilt

Item, if you have used all of your maces, and stand freely with the shield and he also stands freely with his shield, see if you can go under his shield by the point and wrench it toward you, then take it and quickly cast it from you and work with your shield.

Jtem hastu chain cholbn vnd er chain so wint mit im auf vnd merck auf die stoss im füllenn das in an haist den pfindenn oder swech vnd sterck

Item, if you have no mace and he has none then wind against him and note, as you thrust, the feeling; this is called 'finding' or 'weak and strong'.

f. 127v

Jtem ob dw chumbst von cholbenn vnd von schilt so merck auf dy mort griff bey denn füessenn vntenn das drucken auf die schinpain treten auf die chnye griff zw denn hodenn die hüff ringen die stöss zw dem herczen die armpruch zw dem hals vnd den <n>aslechern zw den augen hinder dj ornn oder das Sunen Zaigenn

Item, if you have come from the mace and shield, then remember the “murder grips”: with the bottom of the feet pressing to the shin and stepping on the knee, grasping the genitals, the wrestling at the hip, the punch to the heart, the arm break, to the neck and the nose, to the eyes, under the ears, or the Sun Pointer.