

Recreate Historical Swordsmanship from Historical Sources

02 Choose a Source That's Right for You

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Hello and welcome to *Recreate Historical Swordsmanship from Historical Sources*, an online course. This lecture is *Choose a Source That's Right For You* and in this lecture we will take you through how to choose the right source for you start working on, The question is which primary source should you choose and the four main reasons to choose a source are:

- its period, so when it was written,
- the weapons that it covers,
- the language that it's written in
- and the available support.

Let's take things one at a time. Now, period, when the book was written is quite important. As you can imagine this chap, who is Scott Wilson, an armorer from America who's very, very good at armored combat and jousting and stuff like that. He has different needs from a historical source than this chap who is a French actor from the 19th century who's dressed up as Cyrano de Bergerac. So, establishing the period that you're interested in will narrow the field a little bit and help you to choose a source that you want.

Weaponry is also something to consider. What weapons does this treatise cover? because if you are particularly interested in a kind of weapon like sword and buckler for instance, you may be more interested in that than in the period and this may be your main criteria for choosing a source but you should take into account whether these weapons were commonly used in this period and can you get or make adequate equipment? Here is a problematic choice, scythes. There are one or two sources that include scythes but they are not commonly used in any period for fighting with because they're not terribly easy to fight with and they are actually quite hard to make and I don't know anybody who's actually commercially producing scythes for combat. So you need to take into account how common the weapon is and whether you can actually get reasonable training versions of the weapon requested.

Language. It matters because if you can't read the book, you can't study it and not every book has been translated into English. What translations are available if it's not in your own language or a language you can read? This also has to do with the culture from which the system comes from and when we look at putting your source into its context, we'll be taking language into consideration

there again. You might particularly be interested in a treatise because it's written in a particular language and therefore comes with a particular culture which you're interested in for its own sake. That's fine.

Lastly, you need to consider the available support. So what books have been written about this source or style? What books are available about this period? Who else is working on this topic and are there videos, blogs, or other material available? All of this boils down to do you want to blaze your own new trail or do you want to work on more commonly known material? Both are good. There's nothing wrong with deciding to pick something because nobody else has ever studied it or at least published on it, but it is a damn sight more difficult to get a coherent system out of that sort of book than it is to get one out of a book which lots of other people are also working on.

Let's briefly overview some of the available sources. From before 1400, we have the *Royal Armouries Manuscript I.33*. As you can see some jolly cheerful chaps whacking each other in the head with swords. This is our oldest manuscript and it is a thing of glory. It covers only sword and buckler. This enigmatic page comes MS 3227a, the so-called Döbringer manuscript from 1389 which is the first record we have of Liechtenauer's merc verses, very important document and these are the only two sword-fighting specific sources that we have from before 1400.

In the 15th century, things hotted up quite a bit beginning with *Il Fior di Battaglia* by Fiore dei Liberi, in four different versions from various periods in the various times in the 15th century. This is a picture from the Getty manuscript and we date it to somewhere around 1405 - 1410. Codex Danzig, I included this picture because that is supposedly a picture of Liechtenauer himself. This is from 1452. The Fechtbuch of Paulus Kal from 1470. There are several copies and the chappie with the head of a hawk and the feet of a hind, it's a classic thing from the era. This is Philippo Vadi's *De Arte Gladiatoria Dimicandi*, a page thereof. And if you're a pollax man, this is a must-have middle of the 15th century, written in French, there's no pictures unfortunately but it's a treatise on the use of the pollax.

In the 16th century, there are hundreds of sources. Achille Marozzo's *Opera Nova* from 1536 is one such. If we skip along to 1570, I included this picture from Giacomo di Grassi's *Ragione di adoprare sicuramente l'Arme* because you can see that towards the end of the 16th century particularly, it became more common to explain things in geometrical detail and you can see all these lines of the possible movements of the sword written out in geometrical form. There are just so many possible sources from the 16th century, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention Meyer. I'm not going to try to pronounce the title of that book. This is I think from a later edition which has been coloured but it covers everything you can think of from longsword to the kind of sword you see here, the dussack, and even quarterstaff. It's an amazing book. *The Paradoxes of Defence* by George Silver in 1599. It is generally reckoned to be the first complete historical sword-fighting book written in English. There are a couple of manuscripts from earlier and there is at least one translation of if I recall correctly di Grassi which predate this. Then there's of course Vincentio Saviolo's 1595 book which was written in English so it isn't the earliest but it's the most English of them and anyone who's read it will know what I'm talking about. Of course, having a book in English to start with does make life a lot easier.

Now skipping along to the 17th century, we have for instance *Lo Schermo, overo Scienza d'Arme* by Salvator Fabris. Here we have a picture of how to defend yourself with the rapier whilst stark naked against a similarly naked man with a spear. Of course, everyone knows me as a Capoferro man in the rapier world and here is a plate from *Il Gran Simulacro del arte e del uso della scherma*, an essential rapier source of course. Rapiers sort of fell into disuse in most of Europe in the middle of the 17th century so Bondi di Mazo from 1696 which has recently been translated and published in English, a very interesting book. In the 18th century again, there are just more and more and more. Basically as time went on, people just wrote more and more fencing books and published them not least because publishing books became easier and cheaper. *Le Faite des Armes* by P.J.F. Girard whose name I had to include as--other than the fact that I actually have an original--is it has stuff in it like how to light and throw a grenade which is just fantastic. I don't want to try it because I've read McBain and when he picked up a grenade to throw it, it blew up in his hand and all sorts of trouble ensued.

Again we can't talk about the 18th century fencing scene without mentioning Dominico Angelo and his *School of Fencing* although I should point out that this image is not from the 1763 first edition. It is from the 1787 translation into English and again that striking the sword behind your back is something I've pulled off a few times in free play and I just wanted to throw that in there. So as you can see, there is a ton of material for you to choose from. Let's have a look at how you're going to choose. What I would like you to do for your homework, find three primary sources for each of the following options:

- an English language source between 1550 and 1653, three of those.
- Three primary sources which include sword and buckler in any language, from any place and any period.
- Three primary sources in English or Spanish in the period for the Three Musketeers. So find out the period of the Three Musketeers and there's a catch in there. Am I talking about when the book was published or when the book was set? I'll let you decide that for yourselves. In English or Spanish because of course it's easy to find ones in Italian, French, and German.
- In German or Italian, I want you to find three primary sources which include the small sword because of course there aren't very many German or Italian small sword treatises.

Once you've done that, you should have a pretty good idea as how to find sources and then I want you to list your own interests regarding a source. Include period or culture or specific weaponry and the trick is to be absolutely honest. Then find at least one source that meets those needs and it's in a language you can read or is available in translation and this will be the thing you're going to do most of your work on for the rest of the course, so choose wisely. There's absolutely nothing wrong with choosing something because it's short, simple, and in a language you can read for now, to learn the skills the course is trying to teach you or that I'm trying to teach you on this course. That's fine but you may already all know that the one source for you is I don't know, *Jeu de la Hache* or what have you. Be that as it may, go through the homework exercises that I just set and then be absolutely clear about listing your interests so that you can make sure that the source that you're choosing is right for you right now.

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