

Strictly speaking there are people who consider that HEMA practice should only concern itself with existing manuscripts and the techniques they describe. This is to maintain a strict "Historical" aspect of the martial art. However, this strict approach is not completely satisfactory for a lot of HEMA practitioners who also like to dabble in experimenting, what could be described as "Experimental Martial Art Archaeology" (EMAA) to coin a phrase (I'm deliberately making this acronym similar sounding to HEMA to show their strong connection in my mind). Experimenting with techniques that are known (in other traditions or for other sequences of play) but not explicitly described in the manuscripts for the specific play considered or even going as far as trying to discover a new way to thrust/cut/disarm your opponent would not then be considered HEMA under these strict rules. EMAA would then be the experimenting based on established principles of body mechanics, weapon handling, martial core principles (defend well, gain/keep initiative, attack while being protected) that governs HEMA techniques.

Why experiment with new techniques? These core martial art principles did not appear in a contextual vacuum, overnight on the day the first words were laid on the velum that would become MS I.33. It is highly likely that a strong martial heritage, oral traditions at least was passed down the generations. How many generation remains to be established. Moreover, the venerated masters of the middle-ages and maybe their ancestors if they are only the first ones to record what they themselves learnt orally had to go through a process of experimenting, thus were themselves EMA(A) practitioners (it was not Archaeology at that time though). Being a well-rounded HEMA practitioner therefore may imply eventually indulging in EMAA to follow the footsteps of these masters. First of all, because of the richness and amazing efficacy of the techniques we have in HEMA it can be argued that there is not always one single good answer to a problem. Let's take an example from the J. Liechtenauer tradition of longsword fighting. Your opponent is attacking you with an uberhau. Master Liechtenauer suggested a zornhau but your opponent may be prepared against that. Liechtenauer suggested that their most likely answer to the zornhau is **xxx** that you should follow by **xxx**. Well, what if the opponent does not use **xxx**? In that case, you will certainly have in your arsenal something suitable but not explicitly covered by Liechtenauer. After all, Liechtenauer could not necessarily cover all combinations, he probably only recorded the most efficacious and most likely situations. One interpretation of his work could be that "If you do this, you are likely to win the fight". It does not necessarily mean "it's the only way to win the fight". Obviously, some course of action would be suicidal but other techniques may be perfectly suitable that are not explicitly described (in our study group, we have started investigating some winds in response to the zornhau that we cannot wait to put to the test in competitive free-play). EMAA may therefore allow you to find known techniques that nicely follow you opponent's unexpected failure to follow with **xxx**. Are we still here in the confines of the original manuscript, especially if you squeeze a Fiore Dei Liberi techniques in in response to a German-like move?

The cherry on the cake for EMAA would be to actually discover a completely new move, a new master cut that Master Liechtenauer would be proud of. Is there any room for new techniques? Have some of the existing techniques weaknesses in certain situations that deserve further refinement and development? I am sure that Masters of old were constantly on the look at to identify new ways to defeat robust defences or new master cuts that have no known defensive counter for example. In that case, it is honouring them to try and carry-on the work they transmitted to us.

Additionally, there are quite a few weapons for which we do not have known surviving manuscripts, either because they never existed or because they are lost. Axe comes to mind as a weapon neglected by medieval masters. Also, numerous people ask on forums how Romans or Vikings fought and if it can be assumed they have similar martial art tradition. Maybe they had one and the HEMA manuscripts we have today are only the first recorded examples of a long tradition that took centuries to develop.

A closer inspection of the typology of swords according to E. Oakeshott indicates that there are two main categories of blades, those with a profile taper mainly aimed at cutting with a rather poor thrusting capability (e.g. Type XIIa, XIII, XIIIa) and those with an pronounced profile taper that terminate in acute point clearly designed for thrusting (e.g. Type XVa, XVII, XVIIIb, XVIIIId). The former type tend to be older swords (13th-14th century for longswords) while the latter tend to be earlier (14th-15th century). This change is very likely the consequence of improvement in weapon metallurgy (better quality metal allowed more acute points without making them fragile) and armour development where maille hauberk then plate armour required a more acute point for penetration through the rings or through gaps. *** Any Lloyd or Schola Gladiatoria video to reference ***

The most ancient longsword manuscripts that are in existence date **xxx**. The techniques described in these manuscripts clearly contain numerous methods for thrusting, thus requiring swords with acute points. Illustrations in these manuscripts also clearly show acute points (interestingly, in the same manuscripts, one can also often find not so acute points).

xxx a couple of images.

It can therefore be inferred that a large part of the techniques described in these manuscripts (e.g. zornhau/zornhort) are brand new that probably became more significant with these brand new acute blade designs. Does it also mean that more ancient techniques that focus on cutting were dropped out, being deemed obsolete and to make room for modern techniques (some cutting techniques clearly still exist, e.g. zwerchau)? Does it mean EMAA has some strong contribution to make to rediscover these techniques? Of course, when developing a new technique (unless a previously unknown manuscript come to light that happens to contain your very technique) we may never know if a technique was actually discovered in the middle-ages, used and eventually unrecorded and lost or simply never used. However, I can only imagine Master Fiore or Liechtenauer grinning and thinking "That's my boy/girl" if they could be looking over our shoulders.