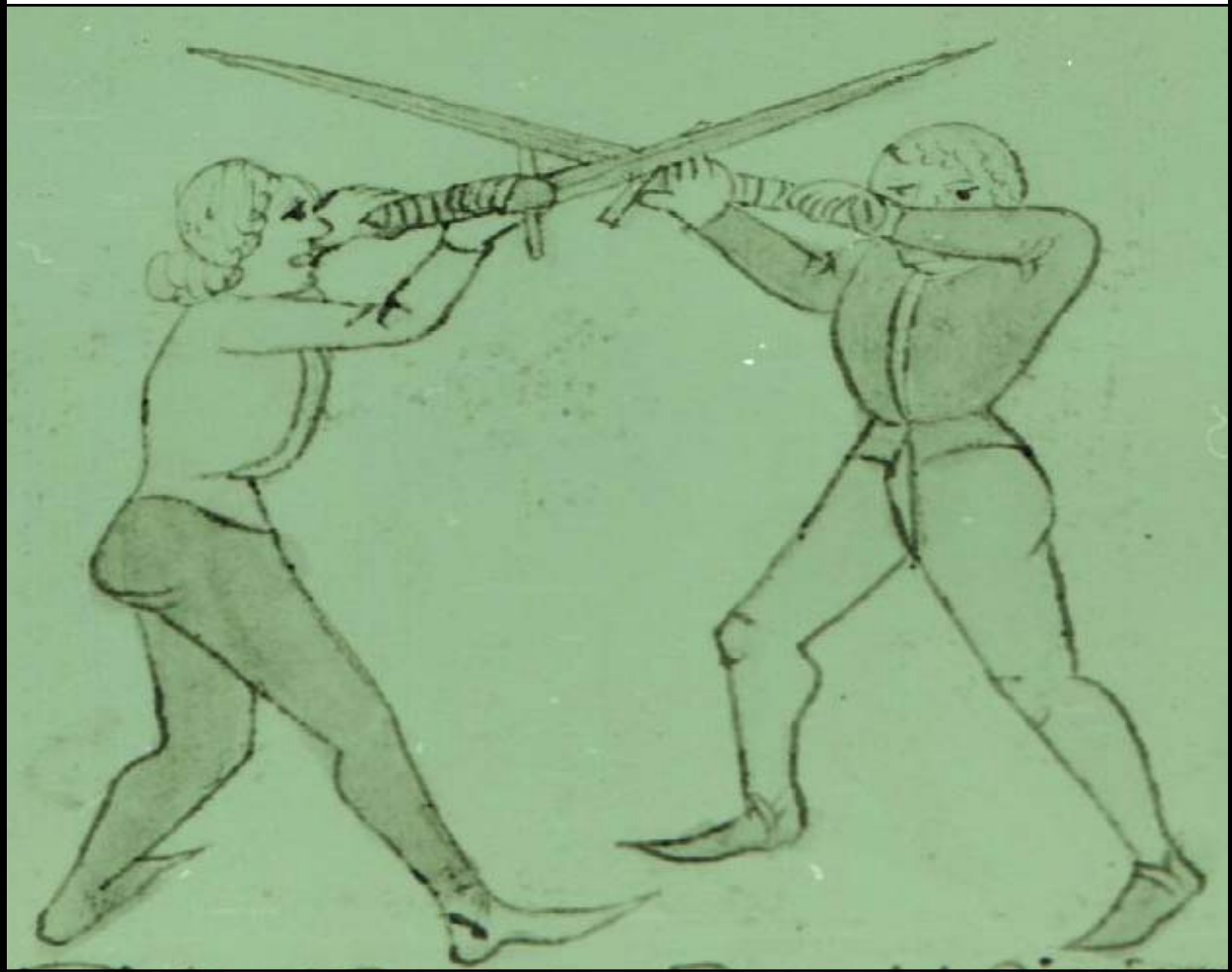


SOME INTERPRETATIONS  
OF SELECTED PLAYS FROM  
THE *WINDEN*  
AS PRESENTED IN THE  
CODEx WALLERSTEIN

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## **Introduction:**

The purpose of this paper is to present an interpretation of four of the plays given to us in the Codex Wallerstein (Universitätsbibliothek Augsburg, I. 6.4°.2) which are related to the *Winden*—a powerful technique of the Liechtenauer school of swordsmanship.

Johannes Liechtenauer was a fourteenth-century fencing master who lived in Germany. He wrote (well, is presumed to have written) a series of rhymes intended to act as mnemonics for students of the Art of Fencing—*der Kunst des Fechtens*—to use to help remember his teachings. These rhymes were later interpreted by many other fencing masters in their own, more detailed, fencing books or “*Fechtbücher*”. Most of these later teachers were considered part of the *Gesellschaft Liechtenauer*, a term coined by Paulus Kal (himself a noted teacher and author of a *Fechtbuch*) and usually translated as the “Liechtenauer Society”.

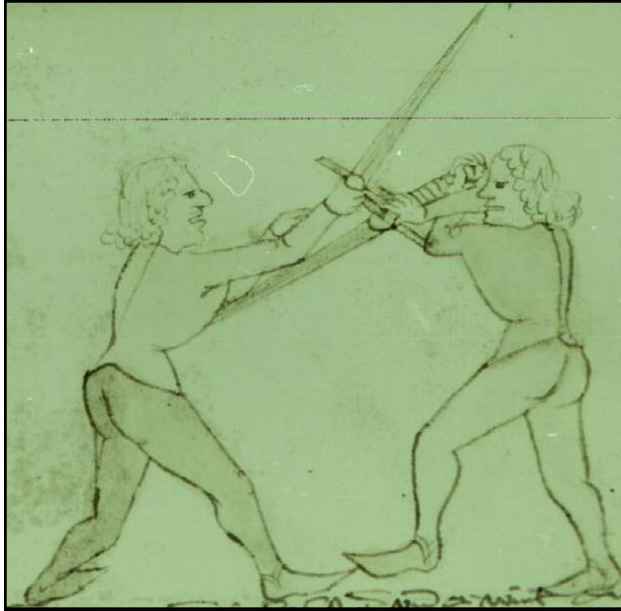
Some authorities have argued that Codex Wallerstein is not strictly part of the Liechtenauer school of swordsmanship (e.g., Żabiński & Walczak 2002, p.11), a question that is beyond the scope of this work. In examining these plays, however, I was struck by the idea that they represented techniques that built on the plays of Liechtenauer rather than being a separate line of teaching. The four plays I will be examining here, for example, are all related to or developments from the *Winden*—one of the primary Liechtenauer techniques.

Nowhere in Liechtenauer’s teachings are we shown a successful counter to the *Winden*. Master Ringeck (another of the Liechtenauer Society masters) tells us that if you wind your opponent may wind in response, and he then shows how to defeat that counterwinding, but it isn’t shown as a technique he recommends, merely something one might need to know how to counter. The anonymous author of Codex Wallerstein, however, gives us several counters to the *Winden*, and several follow-on techniques to use if your counter is displaced. In this paper I intend to examine two separate counters to the *Winden* and two techniques to use if the first of those counters is displaced.

This is in no way meant to be a definitive interpretation of Codex Wallerstein, nor even a complete study of the group of techniques I describe above (for example, I don’t address the *Ringen am Schwert*—grappling at the sword—techniques used to counter the *Winden* from the Codex). I merely hope to examine some of the actions that can occur after a *Winden* is performed in the hopes of better understanding how the Codex Wallerstein relates to other *Fechtbücher* in the German tradition—and, of course, to help us all learn more about German fencing in general.

None of these interpretations should be taken as definitive, of course: All of us who are working to interpret medieval *Fechtbücher* must recognize our own limitations and the gaps in our knowledge that come from studying an art long dead with nothing but vaguely-worded and often confusing books to guide us. As just one example, my first interpretation (page 3) does not precisely match the source even though it works as presented; I like the version I present here, but I confess I can’t make it work *precisely* as the book shows it. To that end I welcome any input or comments regarding this paper in the hopes that it can be corrected and improved.

Thank you for taking the time to read this paper, and I hope it gives you food for thought.



### Elbow Cut Counter to *der Winden*

This is fol. 7r. The text tells us that if you bind and your opponent then winds against you you should strike him with a shortened stroke to his elbow.

The play begins when both combatants strike with the *Zornhau*, and Hugh remains hard in the bind with his point on line. In the middle-left picture Christina then winds onto the weak of Hugh's sword so she can thrust him in the face.

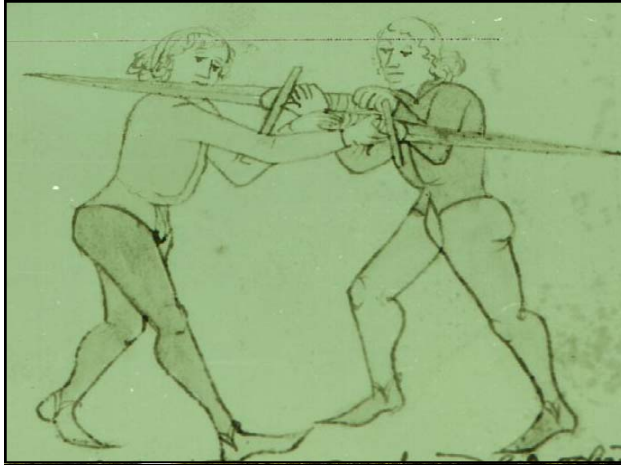
Hugh instantly pulls his sword back and down in the lower left picture as he passes forward; note that this gets him past Christina's point so that her thrust fails. He assists this by using the motion of his sword to deflect Christina's thrust until his blade is below her point.

Finally, Hugh cuts into Christina's elbow with his long edge to complete the play.

In the original text we're told that the defender should wind against the initial *Winden* to get his opponent to lift his sword, however we couldn't find a way to do this since we've been trained that if your opponent counterwinds you simply stay in the wind, lift your hands and thrust over to your opponent's

breast (from Ringeck). The version depicted here, however, worked quite well although it did change the appearance of the final technique slightly. More work will be called for, however, to get the precise interpretation to match the original text.





**Schnappen counter if the elbow cut is blocked:**

This is fol. 7v. In it, we are told that if someone blocks the elbow cut you did in the previous play you are to push his sword down with your hilt and hit him with your pommel and put your short edge on his neck and pull.

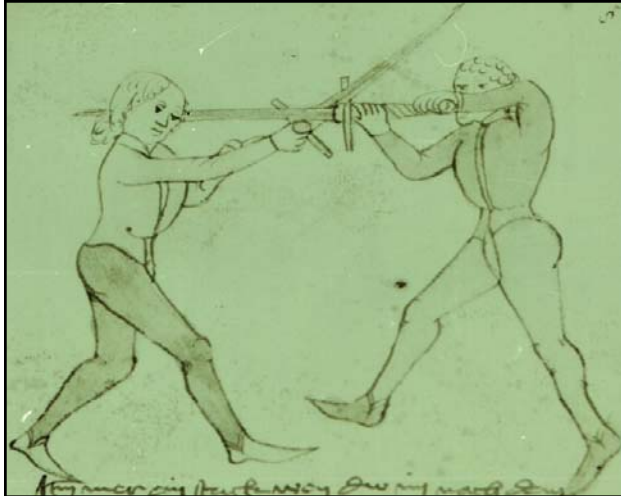
The play starts just before the completion of the previous technique (fol. 7r.). Christina pushes her blade down to block Hugh's attempt to cut her elbow in the middle-left picture.

As soon as Christina's blade touches Hugh's, he immediately uses the strength of her block to whip his sword around (remaining *am Schwert* or on the blade) while passing forward with his right foot as we see in the lower left.

Finally, in the upper right we see Hugh yank his pommel over Christina's hands (this is the "hitting with the pommel" in the instructions) in the same motion and slice his false edge into her neck (note that Hugh should have struck the other side of Christina's head to match the source perfectly).

This is almost precisely the same technique as the *Schnappen* from the *Unterhau* from the left in Sigmund Ringeck's *Fechtbuch*.





**Winding cut if the elbow cut is blocked:**

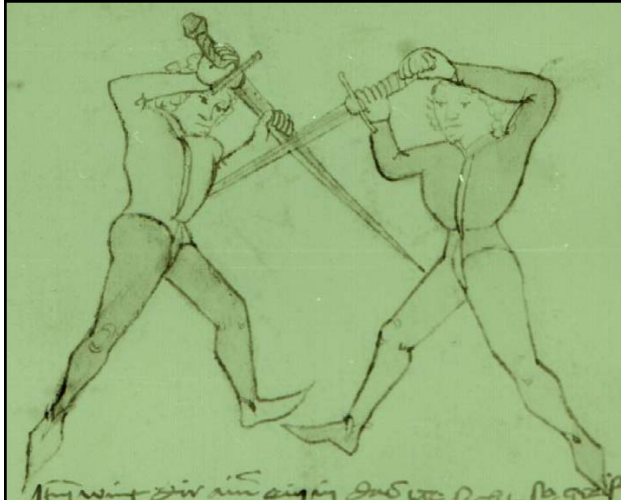
This is fol. 8r. In it we are given another counter to use if our opponent blocks the elbow cut described previously. The text says to remain *am Schwert* and pass forward with your right foot and cut from the outside at his left ear.

Christina has again blocked Hugh's elbow cut, just as she did in fol. 7v.

Remaining *am Schwert*, Hugh pulls his pommel around as he passes forward with his right foot (lower left). The idea is that Hugh's point travels in a counter-clockwise loop around to the target while he keeps his blade firmly fixed to Christina's blade.

Then, still in the same motion, we see Hugh cut with his short edge to Christina's neck in the upper right picture. Note how (just as in the original plate) Hugh catches Christina's sword with his cross as he cuts so that she can't counterattack with a *Schnitt* or slice to his attack.





### **Halbschwert against Winden:**

This is fol. 11r. We're told that if someone winds from the bind then you are to grasp your blade in your left hand and thrust over his blade into his groin.

In the middle picture we see that once again Christina has wound her strong onto Hugh's weak in order to thrust at him.

Hugh *Indes* (immediately) slides his sword back and to his left simultaneously; the important thing is to get his point over Christina's blade, as we see in the lower left. Note that by doing so Hugh's sword naturally moves onto the weak of Christina's sword, thus preventing her thrust from landing.

Hugh then, releasing the grip of his left hand, lifts his pommel with his right hand and passes forward and to his left with his left foot, re-grabbing his blade *Halbschwert* with his left hand while remaining *am Schwert*. He finishes this motion with a thrust to the groin.

Note that this play must be done in one smooth, fast motion with no hesitation or pause at any point since our experiments showed that

any pause would give Christina time to *Durchwechselln*.

NB: While the original plate shows both of the defender's hands above the attacker's sword, in practice we found this to be much weaker than having a hand on either side of the attacker's sword and could find no advantage for doing it that way. We therefore concluded this must be an error on the artist's part.

## **Bibliography:**

Tobler, C. H., Secrets of German Medieval Swordsmanship, Chivalry Bookshelf, 2001

Żabiński, G. and Walczak, B., Codex Wallerstein: A Medieval Fighting Book from the Fifteenth Century on the Longsword, Falchion, Dagger and Wrestling, Paladin Press, 2002

Author's note: None of the Codex Wallerstein plates depicted herein were copied from the above-listed book.

## **Acknowledgements:**

Many thanks to Wendy Bagley for taking the photographs, to Christina Straussburg for patiently acting as my cutting target and model in the photographs, and to my students for their help in analyzing and critiquing my interpretations of these plays.

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*Die Schlachtschule* or “The School of Battle” is a school dedicated to the study of *der Kunst des Fechtens* with branches located in New Jersey and California. The chief instructor, Hugh Knight, has over thirty years of martial arts experience, ten of them studying medieval *Fechtbücher*.

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