Sword and Buckler of the Liechtenauer Tradition

A staple of medieval combative arts, our earliest extant treatise, Ms. I.33 is devoted exclusively to sword and buckler. The Liechtenauer tradition, whose earliest source, Hs. 3227a, is the next oldest surviving work, contains numerous treatises on the matter. This class draws from the works of Andres Lignitzer, Hans Talhoffer, and Paulus Kal. In contrast to the strong preference in Ms. I.33 for keeping the sword and buckler held together, in the works of the Liechtenauer tradition, they often separate. With the buckler, the legs are a much more prominent target, for the buckler can continue to ward the head, mitigating the advantage of the Überlaufen principle we saw with the longsword.

High Defense, Low Counter-Attack

Paulus Kal includes the very simple technique of parrying an Oberhau with the buckler while attacking the leg with the sword. Much as Lignitzer’s more complicated set plays that follow in this class, Kal illustrates the principle of driving an opponent to focus on one opening whilst the combatant takes the fight to another undefended target.

Trapping the Arm

- From a bind, snap out over his sword with your pommel to hook his wrist and at the same time wrench his neck with your blade (at upper right).
- If wrenching his neck is impractical, use your buckler to push his right elbow.
- Alternately, from the bind, wrap up his sword arm with your buckler arm (below, right). This is just like the left arm defense seen with the dagger.
- Talhoffer shows another entry into the buckler arm wrap in the 1459 Thott Codex (below, left).
Attacking an Opponent’s Hand

One risk of not warding both hands with one’s buckler is that of losing the sword hand. Hans Talhoffer shows the grisly results of this in a plate from his 1459 manuscript (at right).

Andres Lignitzer’s Six Techniques

These six plays, found in the Ringeck and von Danzig Fechtbücher and a number of other sources, employ the same theory as the longsword. The first five each focus on a different angle of attack, while the sixth is a half-sword method, coupled with a buckler taking. All of the cautions that apply to dagger fighting apply here too, particularly as the buckler can deliver a powerful punching blow to the face; the fighter must always use care when facing decoupled offensive and defensive weapons.

1. The first technique begins with an Oberhau, which if bound thrusts, or then winds into Ochs, and then snaps over to the other side it need be. This is akin to the longsword plays of the Zornhau, or Stroke of Wrath.
2. The second technique starts with an Unterhau with sword and shield together. The buckler remains in place while the sword “winds apart” to threaten his face. If he parries this with his shield, cut down to his left leg.
3. The third technique begins with a Wechselhau (Changing Stroke)* which leaves your sword low on your left side. From there, strike up against his sword with your short edge, and thence to his head with your long edge. If he parries this, separate the sword and buckler to thrust to the face. If he defends with sword and buckler, take the right leg with the sword.
4. The fourth play starts with a Mittelhau (Middle Stroke) and then employs the Zwerchhau to both sides. Then deliver a Scheitelhau (Scalp Stroke) to the head, and change through below to thrust his groin.
5. The fifth technique begins with a Sturzhau (Plunging Strike)* – a Schielhau-like attack (but done with the hand inverted so the palm faces right) over his buckler. From this, change through around his shield to thrust inside to his body, and then cut down to his right leg.
6. The sixth technique uses the left hand to hold the buckler and the sword’s blade, like the Halbenschwert, so the right hand can take his buckler. Paulus Kal illustrates this technique (at right) in his c. 1470 manuscript.

* Special thanks are due to my colleague, and sometime student, Bill Grandy, for his insights into Lignitzer’s 3rd and 5th techniques.