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Introduction to half-swording in Gladiatoria

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This handout is by no means any comprehensive guide to half-swording in armour. It serves as an introduction to understanding the armoured half-swording techniques contained in Gladiatoria. In the whole manuscript there are 50 half-swording techniques, of which only a small number is presented and explained here. My aim was to give a brief overview of possibilities that Gladiatoria gives you for the armoured combat, and how it ties in with the different period texts on the subject - Johannes Liechtenauer's teachings, Martein Hundfeld's, Andreas Lignitzer's, Sigmund Ringeck's and Codex Wallerstein. It is my belief that Gladiatoria is a compilation of these sources, because it mentions several key elements present there, and absent from other texts.

If you have any comments or corrections, please don't hesitate and contact me at feniks@arma.lh.pl.

Half-swording stances according to Liechteamuer



The first stance. Left leg leading (as in all stances). The sword is raised above the head. This stance offers immediate upper thrust to the visor or *mortslag*.



The second stance. Left leg leading, sword on the right side, point targeted at the face of your opponent. The picture does not do it justice. Correct it accordingly to the advice. This stance offers immediate lower thrust to the visor or to the armpit or also a *mortslag*.

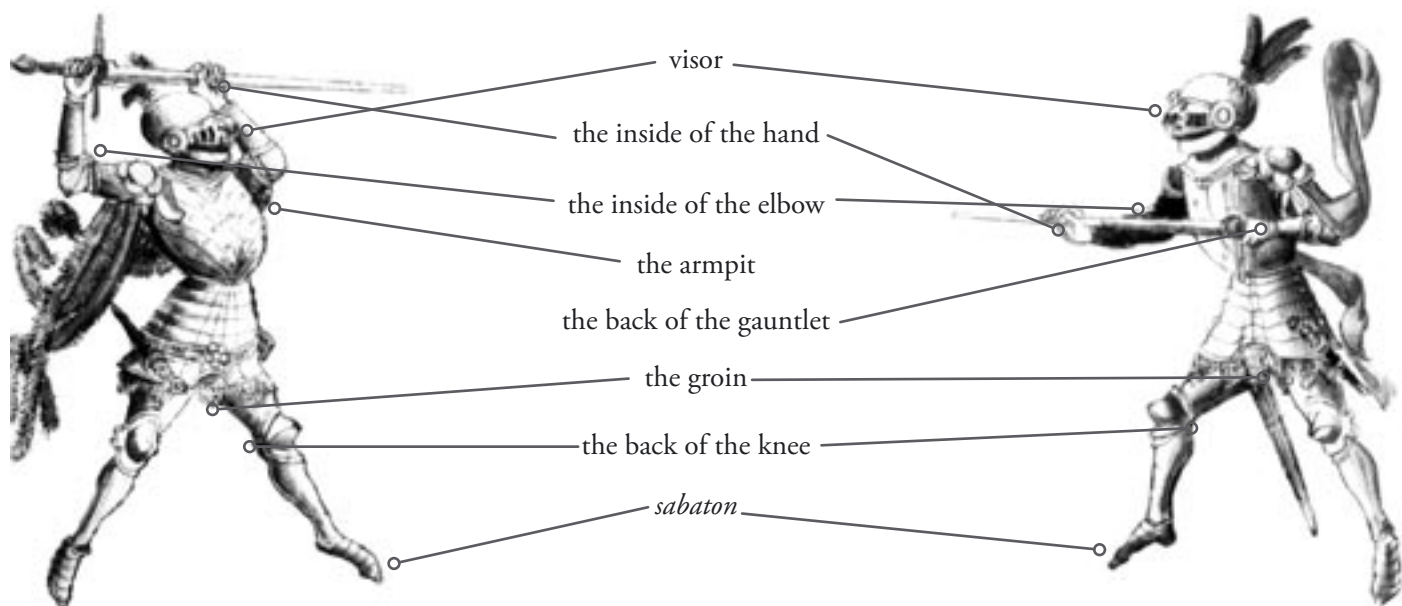


The third stance. No picture of this stance in Gladiatoria, and even this picture from Codex Wallerstein is not a good depiction. Left leg leading, sword rests above the left thigh with the pommel on the right side, and the point on the left. This stance offers a quick transition to the fourth stance and the lower thrust or a *mortslag*.

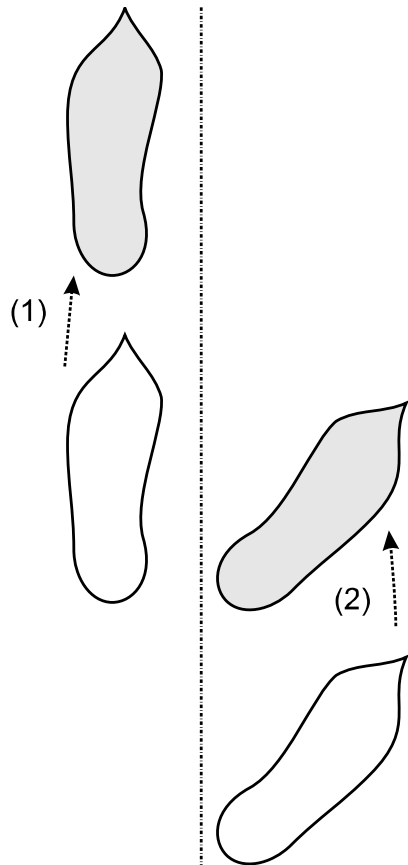


The fourth stance. Executed, if you want to put whole weight of your body behind a thrust and possibly even penetrate his breastplate. Put your pommel under your armpit, change the grip on your sword and thrust. Ringeck also mentions to rest the hilt on your breast.

Vulnerable targets in armour



Footwork



The main footwork principle for fighting in armour is to make as little and as small steps as possible. Liechtenauer writes that to fighting in armour belong only a step forwards (*zutrit*) and a step backwards (*abtrit*), and that man should not make big steps to avoid too much exertion. Our understanding is that Liechtenauer's steps are not the passing steps, but the half-steps, which do not change the sides.

Also, all Liechtenauer stances are left foot forwards, and it is our firm belief that the passing step was not used unless it could be of real benefit to the swordsman and mostly in close distance. Stances with right foot forward actually put swordsman at a disadvantage by not offering any immediate dangerous attack. Gladiatoria includes one technique with a first stance with right foot forwards and it is a defensive technique.

From our experience, it is sometimes necessary to make a longer step. Instead, you should make a step, which we call a "three-step". First you move your leading foot forwards, then you step with the back foot close to your leading foot, and then you make another step with the leading foot. It is simple, quick and effective way of moving forwards and backwards without the necessity to extend yourself, which would be inadvisable in armour.

Basic attacks in Gladiatoria



A **thrust from above**. Aimed at the visor, executed from the first stance. Straightforward and powerful attack. In the picture executed by the figure on the right.



A **thrust from below**. Either to the visor or to the hand, as seen in the picture. Executed from the second stance.



A **straight, powerful thrust**. Executed by a figure on the right, from the fourth stance. As mentioned in the stances section, aimed at the breastplate, sword used as a lance with a whole bodyweight behind. Possible breastplate penetration.



Mortslag. A long- and medium-range technique, attack with the pommel towards the head, the arm or the knee. Liegnitzer gives many more possibilities, but Gladiatoria deals only with the aforementioned three. There are two ways to execute *mortslag*, depending on the side you're striking from. You can make a *mortslag* from the first or from the second stance.

Mortslag techniques



The first *mortslag* technique is a simple throw. When the opponent delivers a strike with the pommel to the head from the right side with a full passing step, the swordsman should defend by catching it between the hands and then step forwards to trip the opponent by laying the sword tip on his neck and putting his left knee behind the opponent's right.



The second *mortslag* is almost a mirror of the first one. Again the opponent attacks at the head, this time putting left leg forward, the swordsman makes a passing step behind his knee and trips him with the pommel on his neck. Notice, that *mortslag* to the left side is delivered in a different way than to the right side.



If your opponent wants to hit your arm between the shoulder and the elbow on your left side (notice, this time no passing step on his part) you should defend by lifting your point upwards and moving the sword to your left. Remember that the hilt should stick more to the left than the point.



The last *mortslag* technique is a mirror of the third one. If the opponent strikes to your right arm, then raise your sword on the right and defend as before. Notice different execution of the attack to the right, and again left leg in front.

Long-range techniques



The very first long-range technique is to stab the attacking opponent to the inside of his hand. Remember to shorten a grip on your sword a little bit and to aim well.

If your opponent attacks you from above towards your visor, you can make a small sidestep to the right and strike between his left hand and the sword, and then pull your pommel downwards to either break his wrist or disarm him. This is a very effective technique.



Similarly to the second long-range technique, this one also ends up lifting the opponent's hand up by pushing the pommel of your sword downwards. This time however your opponent delivers a straight, powerful thrust from the fourth position and you have to sidestep and stab directly from above behind his left hand.

If your opponent delivers a straight, powerful thrust, step back, catch his arm with your left hand, pull him towards you so that his point ends up beneath your armpit and stab him in his foot with your sword.

Pommel techniques



This is one of many techniques which end the *impasse* which results after both opponents delivered a lower thrust from the inside towards the visor of another. The swordsman is advised to pull the opponent's point to the side and then strike from above with a pommel and pull enemy's left hand towards himself to force the sword out of his hand.

This is a technique called "the punishment of the joint" and requires proper distance to execute. When both swordsmen thrust at each other from the outside, the author advises to reach with the pommel for the right wrist of the opponent and pull it.



The second "punishment of the joint", this time from the inside thrusts position. When you both end up parrying each other, you are to reach below his sword with a pommel, and turn 90 degrees to the right, so you can then make a leverage on his elbow. For better effect on this technique you can execute a passing step with your right leg.

This technique starts with the defender in a reversed first stance – with the pommel towards his opponent and right foot forwards. When the opponent delivers a lower thrust to his armpit, then he defends by lowering his sword and making a step with the right foot forwards, to stab him below the knee and throw him. Again, in this technique distance is crucial.

Close-range techniques



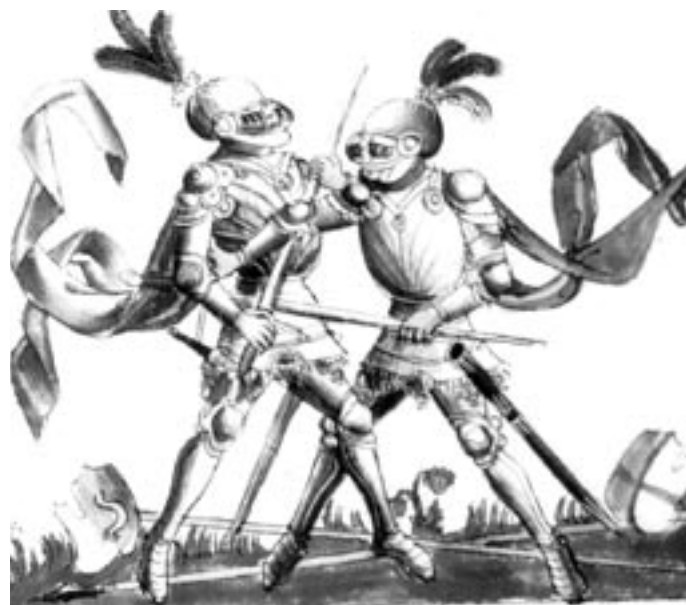
After the inside thrust of both opponents you can catch his wrist and twist his arm, so the opponent's natural reaction would be to pull it back. Then you have time to catch him by the belt and to go forwards with the passing step and by hitting him with your left knee behind his left knee and pulling sideways, you can throw him.



From the outside thrusts, when your opponent strongly pushes your point to your left side, you shouldn't resist, just let go of your point and enter with a full passing step behind his left leg and thrust with your sword between your hands to his neck to throw him.



This is another difficult technique demanding proper timing and distance. From the outside thrust, if you see the chance to put the point of your sword under the right arm of your opponent, by all means do so, and grasp your sword behind, and throw him by lifting your sword upwards.



Close distance techniques are often shown with their counters, and this is the example. The advice is to regain your balance and to reach with your right hand around his body and throw him over your right leg.