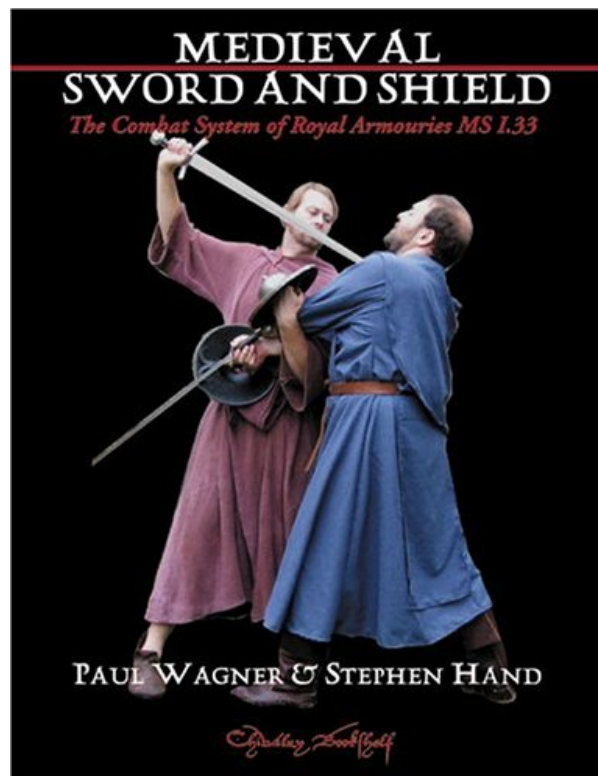
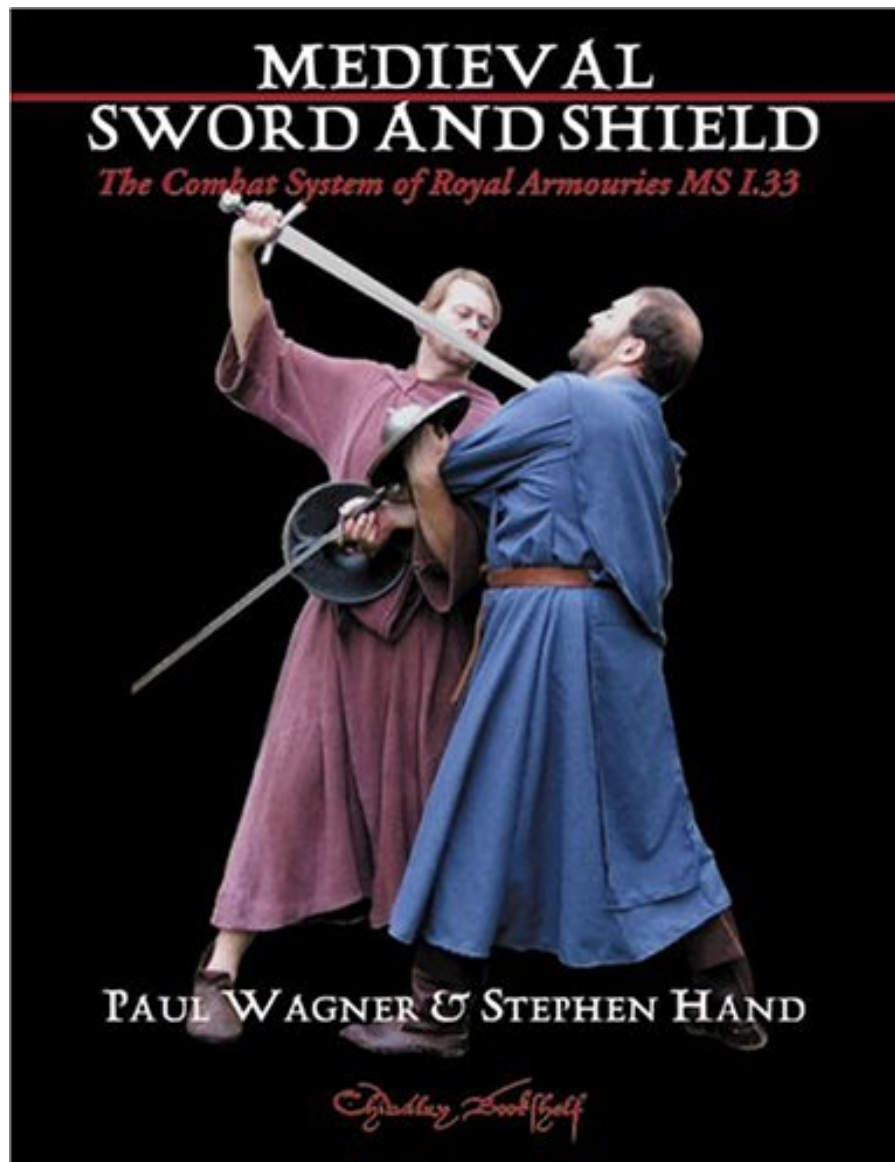


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About the Author

Paul Wagner & Stephen Hand, well respected teachers of Western swordsmanship and founders of the Stoccata School of Defence, have come together to decode Royal Armouries MS I.33.

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Royal Armouries MS I.33 Companion Deciphering the martial techniques in RA MS I.33 can be difficult. Paul Wagner & Stephen Hand of the Stoccata School of Defence, Sydney, have studied the manuscript for five years, working to unlock its intriguing secrets. What emerges is a complex system of civilian sword and buckler combat (including wrestling). All of the I.33 techniques are presented here with clear text are presented with more than 400 photographic illustrations, a complete martial arts system useful for historical martial artists, reenactors, SCA combatants, or any student of medieval military history. Alone or as a companion to Dr. Jeffrey Forgeng's Medieval Art of Swordsmanship, this book is sure to become a swordsmanship and martial arts classic.

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About the Author

Paul Wagner & Stephen Hand, well respected teachers of Western swordsmanship and founders of the Stoccata School of Defence, have come together to decode Royal Armouries MS I.33.

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A Significant Contribution to the Field

By A Customer

People interested in European Medieval martial arts have to realize that these systems were kept secret at the time. Medieval manuscripts on fencing were written for a very select audience and are brief, deliberately obscure, and cryptic. It requires a great deal of effort and dedicated study to try to reconstruct personal combat techniques from period sources with any hope of success. Paul Wagner & Stephen Hand have done an excellent job in that regard with their book. Royal Armouries MS I.33 is the oldest illustrated fencing manual in existence and is devoted exclusively to a single weapon system: the arming sword and buckler. Wagner & Hand have studied all the available period sources on this weapon system and combined that with a lot of hands-on trial and error to come up with a complete and plausible interpretation of the system.

The strength of the book from a scholar's view point is the clarity with which they explain what is not being said in the original manuscript. For example, MS I.33 contains no references to footwork. I appreciate authors who do not blur the line between their own inventions and those techniques clearly grounded in the source. (Readers interested in the source will want Dr. Jeffrey Forgeng's translation and facsimile of the original manuscript titled: The Medieval Art of Swordsmanship.)

The strength of the book from a practitioner's view point is the clarity of the text and photographs. It is a simple matter to work your way through the material following their explanations and illustrations. Given the limited source material, it is only natural that there will be disagreements on interpretation. Mine comes from Wagner & Hand's reliance on 16th-century Italian rapier and dagger sources for their footwork. Admittedly, MS I.33 provides no guidance in this area, but I find 16th-century Italian footwork so distinctive, even compared to other 16th-century styles, that I have reservations about its applicability here.

MS I.33 is an historically important fencing manual and Wagner & Hand have done the European Medieval martial arts community a service by providing a complete and rigorous interpretation. The quality of the presentation reflects their effort and dedication. This book deserves a place on any bookshelf devoted to the subject.

11 of 13 people found the following review helpful.

Not to be underestimated!

By Andrew D. Leitch

Wagner & Hand's interpretation is spot-on in a number of very unexpected ways and although its becoming a bit dated now, its still clearly the best companion book for understanding the I.33 manuscript.

The flaws in the book centre around the interpretation of the footwork. Even they admit that they didn't get the footwork right and published an addendum in SPADA II to correct this. The problem with interpreting the footwork lies in the lack of direction given by the manuscript and the tendency of whoever reads the manuscript to connect it to their own martial arts backgrounds.

I thought that they missed the mark with the footwork because in nearly all their pictures Hand and Wagner have upright stances which lock them into stepping instead of springing - like one does in Olympic Fencing. The typically low stance of Olympic Fencing gives one a lot of spring, and I found that adopting a nearly linear, forward leaning stance - as is found in the I.33 illustrations also gives the same thing (a lot of spring). Which is curious because this stance can also be found in the sword & buckler illustrations in the much later fechtbuch by Jorg Wilhalm (whose work they point to on pages 25 & 100 of their book). The fact that two fechtbuch so separated in time and yet have the same stance should have attracted more of their attention, I feel. If anything, Talhoffer's stance for sword and buckler is more in keeping with what they eventually adopted.

The book also seemed to lack a chapter on "counter-timing" - surely one of the most important principles underlying the art - in particular the "stepping through" and the "shield knock" maneuvers.

But here I am demonstrating my own prejudices. My own perception stems from an assumption that the initial engagement range of a fight is two steps apart - as both fencers agree to negotiate the intervening distance through feint and maneuver in the game of zufechten. Such a style naturally develops the process of feint and counter-time. But Hand & Wagner's interpretation seems to be in keeping with another style. The "wait and see" style of fencer, who perceives fighting distance as one step away by either party. So you stay where you are, allow your opponent to approach, parry his first attack and only then maneuver to take advantage of their newly exposed openings in his defence.

So the question is, what kind of fencer are you? Is this a book which suits your style, or will you have to re-examine their footwork?

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

It's a useful book for educational purposes but it's a decade old ...

By Greg Henrikson

It's a useful book for educational purposes but it's a decade old now and much of this interpretation has since

been changed. Wagner and Hand, like many doing I.33 a few years ago, approach it from the perspective of better known, later fighting arts. So anyone familiar with longsword will notice similar footwork and concepts. Their stance is upright and they are quite conservative in using the buckler. Since then most students of this art, including I believe these authors, have been fleshing out the gaps between the panels of the I.33 sketches more accurately. So instead of the upright-posture, side-stepping style of early longsword, we're seeing a much more forward-leaning and dynamic approach that uses the buckler to control the center line and relies on sword rotation for strikes. If anything the buckler has now become the primary "weapon" in I.33, with the sword playing a secondary role rotating around it. The literature for the newer interpretations is still a work in progress, but Roland's work is probably the best one to check out now. Nevertheless I find this book an interesting companion piece in the way it shows how the HEMA interpretation has evolved in the past few years. Just remember not to get too attached to doing things this way, or indeed any one way. Issues as basic as which foot should be forward for various I.33 guards are still being vigorously debated.

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