The Fighting Seax

Frank Docherty (MCHC)

The History and Combat Methods of the

Fighting Seax

Publishing, London, England

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Dedication

To my Wife Paula, without whose never-failing encouragement this book would never have been written. To Maister Terry Brown who made my Training a happy time and with whom I have never had a crossword .

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About the Author

Frank Docherty, is a Security consultant, author, teacher, and master of English martial arts, he is a former chief risk officer and master locksmith for various government establishments. He uses his considerable experience in those areas to train security personnel for nightclubs and other businesses. His responsibilities to his clients are personal development, self-defense skills, and risk awareness. With a career spanning three decades he passionately believes that the discipline and philosophical development brought about by martial arts practise can help its practitioners to become successful businessmen. After completing his full-time education, Docherty, a native of London, went on to gain qualifications in counselling and clinical hypnotherapy as well as computer science.

Foreword

Although the seax is frequently referred to in period texts there is scant information referring to the weapon's useage, we are therefore forced to seek other means of recreating the combat methodology of the seax. Leading Western martial arts researcher and writer Steve Hicks suggests that we find "frog DNA" or methods currently being taught upon which to build useful comparisons and a solid foundation.

It is fortunate I have at my disposal an understanding of traditional English martial arts to use as frog DNA for seax methodology. Although we can have no way of knowing the exact manner of seax usage it is not unreasonable to propose its usage accords to the principles of English martial arts as laid down at the turn of the 16th century by George Silver in his inter-dependent works Paradoxes of Defence and Bref Instruction upon my Paradoxes of Defence*.

Fortunately I have been studying traditional English martial arts for twenty years with the Company of Maisters of the Science of Defence; this has allowed me to understand George Silver's principles which I have found to be perfectly applicable to the seax. It follows that the actual fighting methods contained in this book are based on my understanding and interpretation of Silver's methods and principles. I believe that this has resulted in a very effective close combat system of knife (Seax) fighting.

The actual Fighting art of the seax is purely my interpretation of all the facts I have found over the last twenty years. They are based mainly on civilian combat. I am lucky to have been training in the English Martial Arts and have graded to Maister (Master) Level This allowed me to approach the subject with a Martial Artists Knowledge and instinct, Which also allowed me to base this style on a tried and tested and proven system of Martial Arts, which is English.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my gratitude to the many people who saw me through this book; to all those who provided support, talked things over, read, wrote, offered comments, allowed me to quote their remarks and assisted in the editing, proofreading and design. I would like to thank my teacher ancient maister Terry Brown for giving me the knowledge that enabled me to publish this book.

Above all I want to thank my wife, Paula, My son Ross, and both my daughters Leah and Sophie and the rest of my family who supported and encouraged me in spite of all the time it took me away from them, it was a long and difficult journey for them. I would also like to thank Maister Terry Brown for helping me in the process of selection and editing and Publishers who encouraged me in my endeavours.

Thanks also go to Ross Docherty because without him this book would never have found its way to the world wide web and therefore to so many people who are starved of real English heritage. Last and not least: I beg forgiveness of all those who have been with me over the course of the years and whose names I have failed to mention.

Thanks also go to Nick of Nicks Knives who custom made the Seaxes that are used throughout this book, and who is one of the best custom knife and Sword makers I have ever ever known.

Warning—Disclaimer

This book is designed to provide information on the Anglo Saxon Broken Back Seax, It is sold with the understanding that the publisher and author are not held responsible for any actions of any people who read this book. If legal or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought.

It is not the purpose of this manual to reprint all the information that is otherwise available from authors and/or publishers, but instead to complement, amplify and supplement other texts. You are urged to read all the available material, learn as much as possible about the Anglo Saxon Seax and how to use it, and tailor the information to your individual needs.

Every effort has been made to make this book as complete and as accurate as possible. However, there may be mistakes, both typographical and in content. Therefore, this text should be used only as a general guide and not as the ultimate source of Anglo Saxon Broken Back Seax information.

Furthermore, this book contains information on the Seax that is current only up to the printing date. The purpose of this book is to educate and entertain. The author and Seax Publishing shall have neither liability nor responsibility to any person or entity with respect to any loss or damage caused, or alleged to have been caused, directly or indirectly, by the information contained in this book.

Part One

The Fighting Seax

The Anglo-Saxons, like the Scandinavian nations, used a variety of weapons foremost among them would be the spear, the sword and shield and of course the fearsome battle-axe; however there was a weapon that was more employed than the battle-axe and that was the seax:

More common than the axe was the single-edged seax, a long knife found in various forms throughout our period (7th to 9th century) and probably the typical early medieval sidearm, especially for those who could not afford swords. Early sacramasaxes are generally short and narrow. They became broader in the 7th century and then increased in length too, so that they are effectively one edged swords by about 700. The Vikings similarly developed one edged swords akin to this type.

Warfare and Society in the Barbarian West, 450-900, (2003), Guy Halsall

Nowhere else in Northern Europe has the art of the seax been more developed than in England, this especially applies to the broken back seax. The English predilection for the knife has always been deep, and knife making was and still is one of Englands oldest and most respected industries. At one point Sheffield was probably the most prolific maker and exporter of Bowie knives in the world. Of course in this day and age, anything to do with knives is taboo even though it is still mans most useful tool.

The long history and complexities of the English fighting arts are embodied in many forms but by the time of Silver's works personal, non-military, combat had become known as the science of defence, or the noble science of defence (a title later inherited by boxing). It is still possible to see in museums and private collections of ancient English weapons an interesting looking implement called a seax; this weapon was made of iron with a steel edge and an iron core and many were pattern welded but usually only along the spine of the weapon. Later examples sometimes have a shallow rounding of the blade towards the point. The Anglo Saxon Seax also has a very distinctive shape which is called the broken-back type Seax. The seax was carried by all members of society as a working tool, but above all it was also a weapon of defense and attack. Numerous variations of Seax were developed, from the small Seax of about three inches to the langsax which could go up thirty inches. The tangs were really long on these types of langsaxes (up to 20cm).

It's difficult to improve upon Richard Underwood's description of the basic seax form in his book Anglo-Saxon Weapons and Warfare1:

> The blade of the knife concludes in an iron tang by which the grip was attached. The grip was made of perishable material such as wood, horn or bone, and does does not generally survive. The majority of knives have quite short tangs, between 3cm and 7cm long, although occasionally it is much longer, suggesting the grip was suitable to be gripped in two hands. The tang is usually a plain iron bar tapering towards the end. It can therefore be presumed that the grip was bored out to hold the tang which was held in place by friction, perhaps aided by softwood wedges or glue. It is possible the tang was heated and burned into place although this would tend to weaken the fabric of the grip. Occasionally knives have metal hilt fittings, either a pommel or both a lower guard and pommel.

Beyond this basic description, the typological classification of the weapon follows the system devised in modern times to describe Frankish finds:

Class A: The narrow/small seax 5th-6th century

Class B: The broad seax 7th century Class

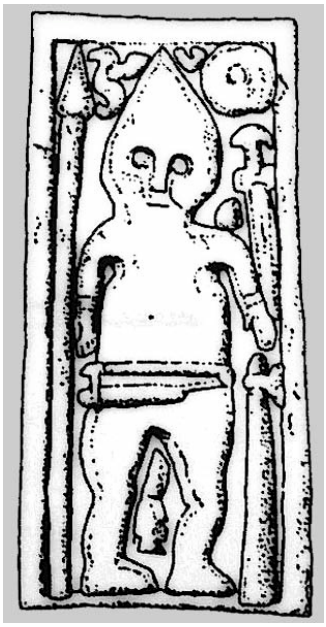
C: The long seax 7th / 8th century

The seax was an everyday working tool, a single-edged knife of varying dimensions that was carried by Anglo-Saxon warriors and free-born men, from the highest to the lowest ranks. In England they predominantly used one kind of seax which came to be known as the broken-back seax. The seax was also widely carried in Northern Europe by the Franks, Saxons, Angles, Jutes, and other Germanic tribes. The Franks influence on the development of the seax in Anglo Saxon England cannot be denied and examples of Frankish seaxes can be seen in many museums around England.

The seax seems to have arrived in England in the 7th or 8th centuries and once in England the it changed its form completely and developed into the broken-back fighting seax unique to England. This new shape allowed for a far better penetration when stabbing or thrusting and because of the shape the balance point was moved forward which gave a much better cut.
During the Anglo Saxon period seaxes were in use throughout the country but there was little evolution of these weapons not because of any bias against new ideas but purely because the original design of the seax was so effective for work or combat.

The seax was also a symbol of Freemanship among the Anglo-Saxons and sometimes a symbol of power. It should be noted that during the ninth and tenth centuries only the English still used long seaxes. The long seaxes on the continent had gone out of use whilst in Scandinavian countries long seaxes had evolved into single-edged swords whereas most swords from the Viking countries would be double edged. The end of the long seaxes can be traced down to the first invasions of the Vikings

differences; first and foremost is its distinctive broken-back blade shape which marks it out from its continental relatives. The broken-back long seax, which could reach lengths of between twenty-four and thirty inches seems unique to Britain. In its shorter forms the seax typically was worn across the stomach with edge upright and with the hilt at the right-hand side. This orientation prevented the weapon from resting on its cutting edge. A 10th century burial cross in a churchyard in Middleton, Yorkshire shows a warrior surrounded by weapons. His seax is shown suspended from his waistband.



This is not to say that all warriors wore their seax this way, but this picture is one of the only contemporary sources we have showing how the Anglo Saxon warrior would have worn his seax. By the late 7th Century the Anglo Saxons had adopted the long seax while still retaining the use of other seaxes of various lengths.

Nearly all the seaxes in this book come from the Museum of London which classify their Seax as follows: Long seaxes of more than 29inches are classified as swords, Those that fall between seven inches and twenty-nine inches are classified as long daggers, whilst those of seven inches and below are classified as utensils.

The origins of this weapon are fascinating to say the least but this weapon gave rise to a sophisticated and deadly form of combat, the techniques of the Seax included skillful parries against any weapon it was pitted against and skillful and deadly blows and strikes aimed at vital points on an opponents body. The hilt of the Seax was also employed with murderous effect:

Nime. eoure seaxes; sele mine bernes.& ohtliche eou sturie.; & nænne ne sparie..
Bruttes .er weoren riche; ah ne cu.e heo noht .a speche.
whæt .a Saxisce men; seiden heom bi-tweonen.

Heo breoden ut .a sæxes; alle bihalues.
heo smiten an riht half; heo smiten an lift half.
biuoren & bihinden; heo leiden heom to grunde.
alle heo slo3en; .at heo neh comen.
of .es kinges monnen; [sone] .er feollen
feouwer hundred. & fife. wa wes .an kinge on liue;
.a Hengest hine igrap; mid grimmen his gri

The crucial section is this:

` Heo breoden ut .a sæxes; alle bihalues.
heo smiten an riht half; heo smiten an lift half.
biuoren & bihinden; heo leiden heom to grunde.
alle heo slo3en;

Layamon, fl.1200: Brut (MS Cotton Caligula) (1205)

A literal translation follows:

They drew out their Seaxes all sides.
they smote on right side, they smote on left side,
before and behind; they laid them to ground.
All they slew.'

A Modernised transcript:

They drew out their Seaxes on all sides
They struck on [the] right side, they struck on [the] left side
In front and behind they laid them on the ground
They slew them all

Here is a classic example of a fighting seax. Often referred to as the Thames Seax

British Museum reference 857,0623.1

Detailed description

Iron seax, with a straight cutting edge running parallel to the back, which is angled towards the point. Inscribed with the 28-letter Anglo-Saxon futhorc and the name "Beagnoth". Known as the "Seax of Beagnoth."

Size
Length: 721 millimetres

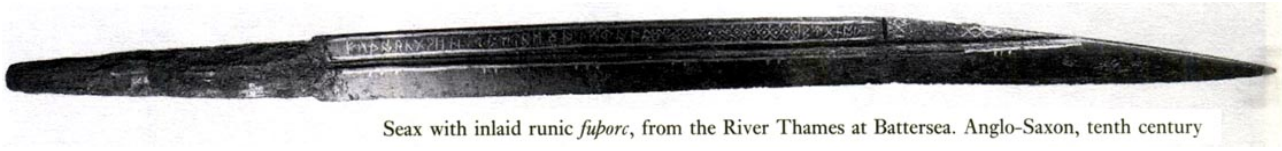
Length: 170 millimetres (handle)

Length: 551 millimetres (blade)

Thickness: 8.2 millimetres (thickest point)

Width: 38.7 millimetres (Widest point)

Weight: 985 grammes Location British Museum



Seax with inlaid runic *fuþorc*, from the River Thames at Battersea. Anglo-Saxon, tenth century

Part Two

Seax finds in London

Seax finds in London

The River Thames is a treasure trove of Anglo Saxon, Viking, and Celtic weaponry, this includes many Seaxes which have been discovered on the foreshore of the river Thames and are still being found to this day.

One Seax in particular caught my attention as It was an especially fine example of an English broken back Seax. This Seax was found in excellent condition, sources say this could be because of the anaerobic burial conditions in which it was found. This one blade in particular is interesting as it was discovered in a 12th Century pit fill. This Seax is known as the pudding lane knife. And was Discovered with both its leather sheath and its handle which was made of Ivory. The Character of this Seax is reflected by its sheath which has been stapled with wire along one edge rather than the traditional butt seam up the back edge. It has been discovered that the blade was forged out to its final shape before the back piece was welded on top of the Pattern welded section and extended round the blade almost to the the tip of it. The final forging process was then continued which included the forging of the tang.

I am going to quote from some sections of A. Vince (ed.) Aspects of Saxon-Norman London: 2

Finds and Environmental Evidence. London & Middlesex Archaeological Society special paper 12 (London 1991) As it has the most up to date information on this particular Seax. It has been discovered that after X radiograph All the main components of the blade which continued into the tang were combined, and this includes the pattern welding. The X radiograph shows that the finished blade resulted from forging and owed little of its form to abrasive processes. The Pudding Lane knife was clearly elaborately constructed; it is thought to have had steel incorporated, and there are signs it may also have been heat treated.

The Sheath

Sheath (220mm long as preserved) The sheath covers the handle but the original length is not known as neither the end of the handle nor the sheath has survived. This sheath was made narrow to hug the blade (29mm at its widest Point) there appears to be no flange or shoulder where evidence of suspension.Points might be expected. (Thornton 1979, 28; Macgregor 1978, 53; Tweddle 1982, 142-3).

Pattern Welding

Pattern welding was done more for decoration on the Seax than functionality although many pattern welded Seaxes have been discovered but some archaeological evidence shows us that many of the Seaxes found were pattern welded along the spine of the blade only. The blade itself was made up of an Iron core with a steel edge. This was a common theme with this type of weapon right up until the end of the Viking age. Of course the best Seax blades were pattern welded most had some pattern on the blade, usually stating the maker and or the owner of the blade.

Pattern welding is the welding process of twisting rods together to distribute the carbon content from which high quality weapons were produced; polishing pattern-welded blades revealed beautiful patterns. In the steel Seax from the Museum of London which is approximately two inches long there is decorative pattern welding with the name Osmund. There are no rivets through the tang or any sign of other type of fixing.

Seaxes Found In London

Scramasax
Overall L 275 mm; blade L 208 mm; W 33 mm

Pattern welded [check acc NOS, A1655 should be one scramasax only, could one be missing A1657]?

Wandsworth, London [Wandsworth] [River Thames]? London and the Saxons Pl XV, 24

A1781 Scramasax

L (overall) 334 mm; L (blade) 247 mm; W 40 mm Evidence of pattern-welding

(River Thames]
For structural study by Brian Gilmour see file in Conservation Dept.

A4978 Scramasax

Overall L 390 mm; blade L 317 mm; W 53 mm

Part, blade and beginning of tang only; 2 lines decorating back of blade and left side of tang; decorated rivet left side of tang unknown

A7444 Scramasax
Overall L 218 mm; blade L 185 mm; W 29 mm Evidence of pattern-welding.Wandsworth, London [Wandsworth] [River Thames]

A7445 Knife
Overall L 136 mm; blade L 98 mm; W 16 mm Scramasax shape; groove on one side Wandsworth, London [Wandsworth] [River Thames]

A9981 Scramasax

Overall L 229 mm; blade L 220 mm; W 23 mm Groove on both blade sides Battersea, London [Wandsworth] [River Thames]

A10485 Scramasax
Overall L 772 mm; blade L 610 mm; W 44 mm
Two long, deeply incised lines along top of blade
[River Thames]
For structural study by Brian Gilmour see file in Conservation Dept.

A10486 Scramasax
Brentford, London [Hounslow] [River Thames]

For structural study by Brian Gilmour see file in Conservation Dept.

A10720 Scramasax
Overall L 283 mm; blade L 228 mm; W 25 mm

Brentford, London [Hounslow] [River Thames]
London & the Saxons Pl XIV, 11 (wrongly listed as A10721) A13501

Scramasax
Overall L 257 mm; blade L 204 mm; W 25 mm

Back tapering towards point; tang section missing
Hammersmith, London [Hammersmith and Fulham] [River Thames] For

structural study by Brian Gilmour see file in Conservation Dept.

A13920 Scramasax
Straight-backed blade curving to point; edge carved, upperside has 2 deep grooves

Mortlake, London (Richmond-upon-Thames; Hounslow] [River Thames] For
structural study by Brian Gilmour see file in Conservation Dept.

A13921 Scramasax

Overall L 698 mm; blade L 535 mm; W 36 mm
Tendency towards angularity of type IV; linear decoration along top of blade

Battersea, London [Wandsworth] [River Thames]
For structural study by Brian Gilmour see file in Conservation Dept.

A13935 Scramasax

Overall L 302 mm; blade L 244 mm; W 40 mm

Knife, 10th-11th century. Angular edge to top, sharp curve to tip; short narrow tang; small section missing; pattern welded.

Brentford, London [Hounslow] [River Thames]
For structural study by Brian Gilmour see file in Conservation Dept.

A17007 Knife
Overall L 130 mm; blade L 95 mm; W 28 mm Part, blade only, scramasax form
Hammersmith, London [Hammersmith and Fulham] [River Thames] A19313

Scramasax
Overall L 317 mm; blade L 244 mm; W 26 mm Curved back; grooved blade
Blackfriars, London EC4 [City of London] [River Thames]
For structural study by Brian Gilmour see file in Conservation Dept. A24349

Scramasax
Overall L 316 mm; W 40 mm; blade L 268 mm strongly curved back, pattern welded; tang sect missing

Fulham, London [Hammersmith and Fulham] [River Thames] [opposite reputed site of Danish camp]

A24909 Scramasax
curved blade; angular projection at back; lower end slightly curves towards point

Putney, London [Wandsworth] [River Thames] [opposite reported site of Danes Camp by Bish. of London palace]

A27086 Scramasax

Fragment, point of type IV; inlaid?copper bands on upper part of blade Hampton, Richmond, London [Richmond-upon-Thames] [River Thames]

London & the Saxons Pl XV, 23. R. F. Tylecote and B. J. J. Gilmour The Metallography of Early Ferrous Edge Tools and Edged Weapons Oxford: BAR 155, 1986, 135-7

Scramasax
L 247 mm; W 33 mm

Evidence of pattern-welding.
7-12 Aldersgate Street EC1 [City of London] C727

Scramasax
[440 mm; W 35 mm

Wandsworth, London [Wandsworth] [River Thames]
For structural study by Brian Gilmour see file in Conservation Dept. O2100

Scramasax
L (overall) 443 mm; L (blade) 340 mm; W 33 mm

Iron scramasax, with tang; curved at end; blade sides grooved; pattern welded

Old England, Brentford, London [Hounslow; Richmond-upon-Thames] [River Thames] For structural study by Brian Gilmour see file in Conservation Dept.

O2100a Scramasax
L (overall) 713 mm; L (blade) 538 mm; W 37 mm

Iron scramasax, with tang; grooved on both sides of blade
Old England, Brentford, London [Hounslow; Richmond-upon-Thames] [River

Thames] For structural study by Brian Gilmour see file in Conservation Dept. O2100b

Scramasax
L (overall) 429 mm; L (blade) 350 mm; W 150 mm

Iron scramasax, grooved; pattern welded
Old England, Brentford, London [Hounslow; Richmond-upon-Thames] [River

Thames] For structural study by Brian Gilmour see file in Conservation Dept. O2101

Scramasax
L (overall) 305 mm; L (blade) 230 mm; W 31 mm

Iron scramasax, pattern welded , without grooving on blade unknown For structural study by Brian Gilmour see file in Conservation Dept.

O2102 Scramasax
Iron scramasax, pattern-welded blade.

Richmond Lock and Weir, D well, Richmond, London [Richmond-upon-Thames] [River Thames]

O2136 Scramasax

L (overall) 290 mm; L (blade) 181 mm; W 37 mm
Iron scramasax, ornamented on left face; curved cutting edge

Old England, Brentford, London [Hounslow; Richmond-upon-Thames] [River Thames]

For structural study by Brian Gilmour see file in Conservation Dept. [Should this be given a part number too, since there's also acc NOS O2136a-c?]

O2275 Scramasax

L 460 mm; W 36 mm
Blade only of iron scramasax; grooving along back; bent into slight curve; both sided
Old England, Brentford

R. F. Tylecote and B. J. J. Gilmour The Metallography of Early Ferrous Edge Tools and Edged Weapons Oxford: BAR 155, 1986, 129-31 [S42].

29.94/17 Scramasax

Overall L 337 mm; blade L 278 mm; W 30 mm
Seax with long straight blade, angled back; tang bent. Princes Street, Bank,

London [City of London] Object Handling Collection-Medieval tray. 78.107/1

Knife Whole: 136 x 24 mm

Scramasax form; inlaid inscription ""OSMHND""""

Putney Bridge, Wandsworth Bridge (between), Putney, London [Wandsworth] [River Thames]

J. Clark 'A. Saxon knife and a shield mount from the Thames Foreshore' Antiquaries Journal 60 (1980) 348-9

80.355/1 Scramasax

Overall L 218 mm; blade L 260 mm; W 30 mm
Decoration at top of blade; hilt/tang missing
Unknown

Acquisition source uncertain. For structural study by Brian Gilmour see file in Conservation Dept.

80.355/ Scramasax
Overall L 296 mm; blade L 228 mm; W 38 mm
Blade top grooved on both sides; section of blade missing

Scramasax
Overall L 460 mm; blade L 260 mm; W 30 mm
Tang very corroded
Unknown
For structural study by Brian Gilmour see file in Conservation Dept.

80.355/4 Scramasax
fragment; traces of inlay Unknown 81.169/2
Knife

Scramasax
Overall L 225 mm; Blade L 168 mm; W 36 mm Pattern welded Unknown
81.394/2
94.177

Scramasax
L 238 mm; W 27 mm blade L 150
Blade sides grooved; tip and part of tang missing

Scramasax
Overall L 156 mm; blade L 128 mm; W 30 mm Part, blade only; end cut at angle

Scramasax
Overall L 360 mm; blade L 322 mm; W 25 mm. 10989

Scramasax

L (overall) 440 mm; L (blade) 305 mm; W 38 mm Grooved blade Stratford, London [Newham] [1898]

15262 Knife
Overall L 126 mm; blade L 98 mm; W 16 mm

Scramasax type
Barge Yard, 1 Queen Victoria Street, London EC4N 4TN [City of London]

[1879]

15346 Scramasax

overall L 180 mm; blade L 125 mm; W 15 mm part, blade only
London [City of London]
GM Reg note: Purchased as part of the Smith collection.

22212 Knife

Tanged knife with flattened back;?derived from Saxon scramasax? London GM Register note: Gould Collection.

Part Three

Basic Principles

Basic principles of fighting with the Seax. The Seax is one of the most practical fighting knives ever to have come into existence. A student can become fairly proficient after only a few months training. But it takes much training, time and skill to master the art. The knife is the great equaliser, it doesn't depend on size or strength only determination and skill. This skill provides both an effective method of self defence and a fascinating interest for those moving on into the world of English martial arts as a whole.

The basic principles of the art are, The four true times, the four false times and the grounds and governors. These are the principles that allow a person to use the true fight.

The men and women who taught the English martial arts knew that there were vital principles which must be adhered to in self defense.These principles apply to all weapons and unarmed fighting as well.

The most important were the four true times which are

time of the hand

time of the hand and body

time of the hand, body and foot

time of the hand body and feet

The true times are in descending order to the comparative speeds of movement when in a fight the time of the hand is fastest, then comes the time of the hand and body, slightly slower than the time of the hand. Then comes hand body and foot which is faster than hand body and both feet. The true times are so called because they give the safest way to move in a fight and are categorised by the fact that in true time actions the hand always moves first. Conversely there are false times, these are actions which do not begin with the hand; there are four of these:

Time of the foot

Time of the foot and body

time of the foot, body and hand

Time of the feet body and hand

These false times present the complete opposite to the four true times. An example would be that

moving the foot and body is slower than moving the foot by itself. Of course all fighters and Martial artists know that circumstances dictate what happens in a fight but training in the right way will always give an advantage in a fight.

Allied to the true times are sets of factors which, when understood, enable fighters to better utilize the true times, these factors are known as the grounds and governors. The grounds are as follows:

Judgement

Distance

Time

Place

Through judgement you keep your distance, through distance you get your time, through time you safely win the place in which to defend or strike. Judgement: means being able to keep an optimum distance between yourself and any attacker. Place: refers to an opening in the opponents Defense where you will be able to attack your opponent.

The governors are as follows:

Judgement

Measure

Pressing in

Flying out

Judgement: is to know when you can safely attack your opponent, or when the opponent may be able to do the same to you. Measure: is to keep your space true, which means to keep an effective guard and recognise when your opponent is in disorder. Pressing in: is to attack when your opponent is disordered. Flying out: This is to disengage from your attack or that of your opponent. Anyone wishing to delve into these principles further should read English Martial Arts by Terry Brown.

Part Four

Martial Use of the Seax

The first tenet of practical combat is SIMPLICITY. which simply means all the movements, techniques are kept simple and uncomplicated which means they can be easily learnt and applied according to the true fight. The second tenet is PRACTICALITY, English martial arts are one of the martial arts system that meets these requirements and is therefore well-suited for actual combat. The Seax, as part of the arsenal of english weapons was highly esteemed by the warriors of Anglo-Saxon England.

A great martial art is more than the movements you see, a practical set of principles are needed and they need to be taught according to those principles. It is certainly possible that there was more than one way to fight with a seax. but i have simply taken it as a short sword or a big knife and along the same principles set down by later masters of the English martial arts, but there are a few other clues about the martial use of the seax. Fortunately, we have evidence from literary and archaeological sources about many historic weapons and fighting techniques. These sources tell us that the English warrior, and even everyday men and women, systematically trained in martial arts probably already ancient to them, and which comprised a fighting system. For example, the famous British Antiquary Leland tells us that King Alfred the Great (871-899AD) had his warriors trained in both armed and unarmed combat.

The physical features of the broken-back seax itself provide some clues to how it was used in combat. Even in its longest forms, the seax allowed a warrior to fight in close. Its sharp wedge shape gives it great piercing strength. A cutting blow would smash flesh and bone beneath mail. On an unarmoured body, a cut would prove to be crippling or deadly. Likewise, its needle point would make thrusts devastating to the human body.

That the broken-back Seax was a very effective weapon, was demonstrated by its widespread popularity literary references. Even from a modern perspective, I would prefer this ancient and effective edged weapon over any other weapon for self-defense. Fifteen-hundred years later, the broken-back Seax still makes a very convincing case for itself.

In Grettis saga for instance, Grettir preferred his seax, called Kársnautr, which he took from Kár's grave mound.

The epic Poem Beowulf is a good source of information. it describes swords, and other weapons which make it a valuable tool for historians and Martial Artists alike. Swords and armour are the focus in Beowulf's poem which also delves into weapons like the Seax. There are times in Beowulf in which the story teller talks about the use of the seax. As it says when Beowulf is in the midst of the fight with Grendel's mother, the story teller gives an account of the seax she has, "So Grendel's mother jumped on him and pulled a broad, whetted knife (seax): now she could avenge her demon child". when Beowulf attacks the worm and his sword breaks he uses a knife to fight, "Once again the king sought his strength and drew a stabbing knife (seax) he wore on his belt, sharp for battle. He thrust it deep into the worm".

From Beowulf

"Þa gen sylf cyning
geweold his gewitte wællseaxe gebræd
biter ond beaudoscearp, þæt he on byrnan wæg
forwrat Wedra helm
wyrm on middan" (2702 - 2705)

"Then the king himself
gathered his wits; drew a killing-knife
of keenest battle-sharpness that he carried on his mail-coat.
The Geats' Protector hewed the Worm in two."

A good description of the use of a Seax occurs in
Brennu-Njáls saga, at the fight on the Rangá in chapter 63:

*Kolr thrust at Kolskeggr with his spear
while Kolskeggr whilst he was occupied with many opponents. The spear thrust went through Koskegg's thigh. Kolskeggr stepped forward and severed Kol's leg with his Seax, and he asked, "Did that Strike you?"*

Kolr replied that it was his own fault for not shielding himself. And stood looking at his leg stump.

Kolskeggr said "You don't need to look: it's just as you think, the leg is gone." Then Kolr fell down dead.

There are other aspects to the Seax in both civilian use and on the battlefield, one of these was the drawing out of the Seax from the sheath which was an important skill because in battle you needed an instant and coordinated burst of speed. Such speed could enable a killing blow, or even a strike with the butt end of the Seax.

These actions were equally effective in both civilian and battle scenarios. Such techniques can be used without warning against any opponent and are very hard to defend against as the closeness of the opponents makes it difficult to react in time. These methods can also be used to strike to the front or sides of your body.

Whilst methods such as those described are a part of Seax fighting the type of sheath used for any particular Seax and where the Seax is worn on the body could affect the methodology of drawing the Seax from its sheath.

The term 'Scramasax' is often used across the board to describe the Seax although it occurs only once in a historical account, in the 'History of the Franks' by Gregory of Tours. He tells how the sixth century Frankish king Sigibert is assassinated by two young men using 'strong knives commonly called Scramasaxes'.

Part Five

The Seax In Action

The Following is a presentation of the Seax in action, there are many ways of using the Seax and I will show the reader as many ways as possible, using different size Seax, The drawing of the Seax, the guard positions of the Seax. etc.. The methods shown here are of course my own interpretation of the research material; I have supplemented this by using knowledge gained in my study of English martial arts.

Part one

* Grip (gráp)

* Guards (weard, ward, warding).

* Stances (fæststeall) standing firmly

* fighting positions. (feoht) action of fighting

* The stances and guards presented here are only guidelines to the student, I have found that these guards and stances represent the best way to guard yourself and stay within the true fight. The Grip, guards, stances and fighting positions are taken from my experience with English weapons such as the backsword, Silvers knife fight and broadsword, as well as all the research done on the Seax as to how it was held and presented. The Stances represent attacking and defensive moves, and the fighting positions are the ways of presenting the blade. Anglo Saxon names are used for the guards with the modern english translation below.

Part Two

The Killing blow of the Seax. (offyllan) to strike down destroy kill

* Vital areas (inwund) internal wound

* The Cut (snid) cutting slaughter

* The Thrust (wælsweng) deadly thrust

The Killing blow is when the Seax either cuts into the body or thrusts into the body The targets shown are the vital areas for both the kill and the maiming of another person. The Seax is a weapon that can be used for the cut and the thrust and both will be shown.

Part Three

The Drawing of the Seax from the Sheath (tige) Drawing the sword

The drawing of the Seax from the Sheath will be represented from a close position, from the front of the body. And From the Back of the body. These close techniques are only a guideline for students.

Part Four

The fighting techniques of the Seax. (feoht) action of fighting

The Fighting Techniques shown are a guideline for students although I have found them to be the most practical for this weapon. These fighting techniques will take the form of basic one time stops and strikes, and Basic double techniques.

Part Five

The Seax and Other weapons. (gewæ) armour weapons arms

This section will deal with the Seaxes ability to fight with weapons other than the Seax. We will use Seax vs Sword (hæftméce) hilted sword, and Seax vs hand axe (handæx) hatchet a kind of axe.

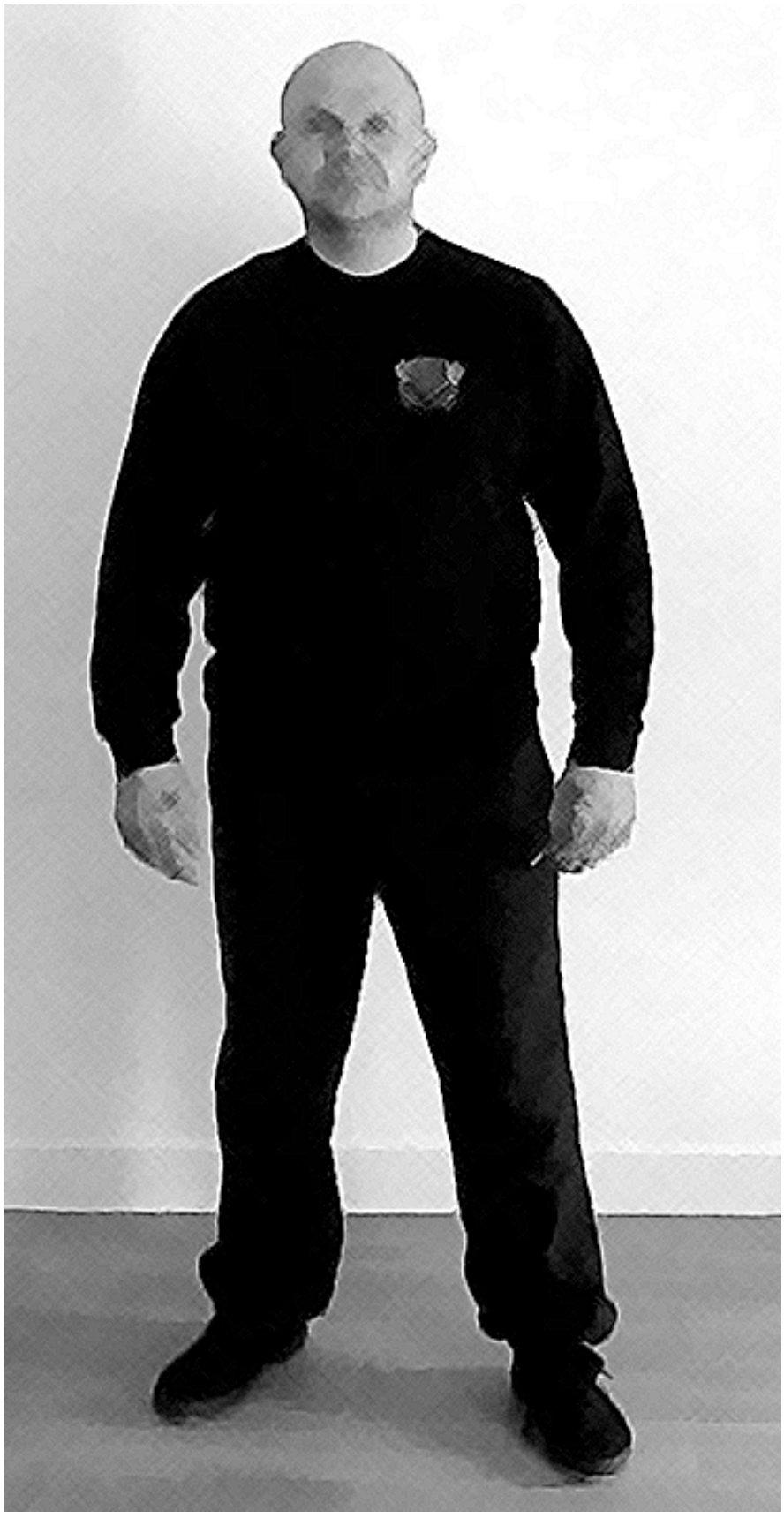
We will also use Seax and Shield (heaðulind) linden wood shield

Sword and Shield (heaðulind) linden wood shield

The Grip (gráp)

The grip taught for the Long Seax and the Short Seax is a very simple Hammer Grip. There is no need to change the grip either when Defending or Attacking.

Positions weard (ward, warding).



innan weard

inside Guard

utan weard

Outside Guard

heafod weard

St Georges Guard

hongende weard

Hanging Guard

neþer Utan weard

Low Outside Guard

neþer innan weard

Low inside Guard

Stances

(fæststeall) standing firmly

Appendix

Resources

Sheaths and scabbards in England, AD400-1100 (Oxford).

Gale D.A., The Seax. In: Chadwick Hawkes S. 1989 Weapons and warfare in Anglo-Saxon England. (Oxford) 71-83.

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Szameit E. 1987: Karolingerzeitliche Waffenfunde aus Österreich. Teil II: Die Saxe und Lanzenspitzen. Arch. Austriaca 71, 1987, 155 ff.

Underwood, R. 1999:
Anglo-Saxon weapons and warfare (Stroud).

Terry Brown 1997:
English Martial Arts. Anglo-Saxon Books Ltd.

The following may also be useful:

Anglo-Saxon crafts: Coatsworth E., Pinder M. 2002

The Art of the Anglo-Saxon Goldsmith (Woodbridge) Hinton, D.A. 2000

A smith in Lindsey: the Anglo-Saxon grave at Tattershall Thorpe, Lincolnshire. Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph series 16 (London) Cameron E.eax