



Some thoughts on

Lightsaber combat for HEMA people

Lightsabers are awesome. In the past years a community emerged and a variety of different lightsaber models, that are „combat ready“ or „suitable for sparring and stage combat“ appeared on the market. For sure, not every HEMA guy I know is so in love with lightsabers as I am, but 9 out of 10 people I met so far, have at least a little interest in it. So what do HEMA people need? Right, a source they can study and discuss and argue about. Unfortunately, we don't have a real source, that we can work with. At least we don't have something comparable to a medieval source. So what do we have? There is some information on lightsaber combat that is available. This text will try to compile the information on lightsaber combat available and is open for corrections and additions.

How do Lightsabers work?

What do we know? Lightsabers can „cut“ by burning through almost every material. If they make contact with another lightsaber, they deliver impact energy. So far they don't differ from the swords, we are used to. What is different is the blade geometry. Medieval swords have a lenticular, diamond or hexagonal cross section, that is needed to equip the blade with the abilities it needs. A lightsaber blade is round – basically it's like a stick. So in comparison, it is not important, with which part of the lightsaber blade you hit, the result will be the same. So if blade alignment doesn't matter at all, we have a very good explanation, why most hilts of a lightsaber are round shaped. Why bothering with any swordfighting technique then? Can't we just stick fight with a lightsaber?

Binding ability

Simple answer is no. Lightsaber blades stick to each other, like sharp steel swords do. Evenmore they are pulled against each other when blades come close, like some kind of electric magnetism or gravity field is active (see Rebels series, S03E15). This would also explain why even people, who are not trained in the force can deflect blaster bolts (Episode IV, Lukes first training on the Falcon).

This means, that we have a fancy glowing stick, that has a sharp blade everywhere (remember that screaming sound, lightsaber blades make, when they are in a bind?). What does that mean considering the use of force...or let's better say strength in combat? Assuming that a lightsaber cuts as well as a steel sword, you don't need a lot of strength to cut through a



target/an opponent. But if those blades bind, no matter how they come together and they also bind without delivering pressure, strength becomes a topic again, like it does in stick fighting. Thus bashing away the opponents blade becomes one of the core elements of lightsaber combat.

Lightsaber winding

Winding like in German longsword fencing is kind of impossible. What is still applicable is the principle of the strong and the weak part of the blade. In terms of winding, this opens a new door. You cannot wind in a classical matter, because as long as you have blade contact, you are in the bind. You cannot get out unless you pull or push abruptly – what would be a waste of tempo. What you should be able to do instead, is rolling your blade over the other. This may help to change your blade angulation and so change your lever or create a new threat for the opponent.

Hand protection

Lightsabers don't have handguards. I think that's because they don't need them. Blades cannot slide at each other, so that you should be able to sense an attempt to attack your hands out of a bind – even without being force sensitive. Direct hits to the hands or arms are a threat like in steel sword fencing, but should be nothing new to HEMA people.

Let's have a look on lightsaber styles and to what they are comparable in the HEMA World. If you want to take a closer look, „The Jedi Path“ is your book! („Jedipedia“ or „Wookieepedia“ may help as well)



Form 1 Shii Cho

This form is described as the basic form, every Padawan starts with. It includes basic stances, the basic targets, parries, cuts and thrusts. We find a lot of similarities to any given HEMA source out there. The opponent is divided into quarters, up and down and left and right. Sounds familiar? You have 4 cuts to those openings and corresponding counter cuts to parry an attack. There is also a thrust, aimed to the middle of the cross that divides the target. Additionally, this form includes wide sweeping cuts, that work very good against many opponents, when you are outnumbered (hello Montante).

Form 2 Makashi

This is called the duelling form. The lightsaber is used one handed here and especially the arms and legs are added as target. The style is foremost used to wound an enemy just with a light touch (hehe) of the blade. Everybody who burnt himself once knows how bad those wounds hurt. The Form 2 reminds me of sidesword and saber fencing, maybe a little bit messer, with a lot of sidestepping and circling around the opponent. Cut oriented bolognese sidesword or later saber sources should work as HEMA alternative to use this style. Thrust oriented fencing, like rapier doesn't seem to be a good idea, because for that you would definitely need a functional hand protection.

Form 3 Soresu

This form is described as the perfection of defense. The user is nearly unbeatable, because you cannot hit him. Instead, he hits you, when you are tired, with the one perfect counter. I think Soresu isn't really applicable, because being defensive all the time doesn't seem like a good idea to me. The core of Soresu is clean parrying and redirecting the attacks of an enemy. Sounds like Aikido to me. If you want to press it into a HEMA source, maybe Fiore fits. He never attacks first, but defends and usually ends the fight with one single counterattack.

Form 4 Ataru

The so called aggression style focuses on constant movement. Fighter and blade never stand still and the movement is combined with acrobatics (if possible). In its fluidity, the style reminds me of Meyer and the concept of building up pressure is Liechtenauer tradition at its finest. If you add some spinning attacks and flicflacs, this should look like a very good Ataru.



Form 5 Shien and Djem So

Here we have two interpretations of the same concept. In the Jedi tradition, Shien is mostly adapted from Soresu, but more precisely in deflecting blaster bolts. Djem So mixes Soresu and Makashi and is a very efficient style for duelling. For HEMA and real life lightsaber combat you can say, that Shien focusses on countering. Not like Soresu with one perfect counter, but countering every attack. Umschlagen and Twerchhau seem to be the most suitable techniques for this style and also a Streichen should fit in here. Djem So also focusses on the concept of Umschlagen but is far more „straight forward“. Its signature move is a straight Oberhau with a lot of strength to break through the opponent's defense. The use of powerful blows is crucial for Djem So and so it uses a core concept of stick fighting.

Form 6 Niman

This is a blend of everything else. A little bit of everything, but nothing really good. In my opinion, this is the most useless Form.

Form 7 Juyo

This style focusses on feinting. It is mostly used by Sith and in my opinion, its core elements are programming the opponent and deceiving him. Succeeding this way is truly an art in itself and it may work on many but it won't work on everybody. For HEMA, the concept of the Fehler is the technique to look at if you want to add some Juyo to your style. Another good source might be Wittenwiler, although I don't think of his plays but more of the spirit an idea in this source.

Jar'Kai

This form is for wielders of two lightsabers. Who wants to add a Shoto (shorter off-hand lightsaber like a Dagger or a Whakizashi) should have some experience in this kind of „dual wielding“ and combine his skill with the elements of any other style above.

Shout out

If you like lightsaber combat, please feel free to add your thoughts and send this to everybody who might be interested!