HOP-LITE

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Historical and Cultural Perspectives

Southern Indian Combative Systems in Transition

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Kerala, South India

In June and July of 2003, the International Hoplology Society (IHS) conducted a field trip in southwest India. We covered portions of the states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka. The aim was to conduct a survey of combative systems and sport martial arts currently being practiced in those areas. The party included myself, my son, Hunter C.S. Armstrong, Karunakaran, a long-time IHS hoplologist from Penang, Malaysia, and Moses Thilak, one of India's foremost authorities on Indian fighting arts.[1]

The trip began in Trivandrum (Thiruvananthapuram), the capital of Kerala on the Malabar coast of southwest India, an incredibly green and lush rain forest area. It was there that Hunter and I met up with Karunakaran and Moses Thilak.

Moses Thilak ("Moses" is his surname) is known in India as the "father of Indian karate;" the man who introduced karate to the country. He has been involved in fighting arts training since a young boy, having started in *kalaripayattu* under his uncle. Early on he became interested in Japanese karate, and eventually established karate schools throughout the country. This provided him the opportunity to do research into many of the native fighting arts indigenous to the areas in which he was teaching karate. He has done considerable field work in many of those systems, and is likely the most knowledgeable individual in the field of Indian fighting arts. A bit over twenty years ago, he was instrumental in providing the BBC with introductions to prominent Indian martial arts teachers in the well known documentary on Asian fighting arts, also the basis for the Indian section in Reid and Croucher's book, *The Fighting Arts* (Simon and Schuster, NY, 1983).[2]

In this issue...

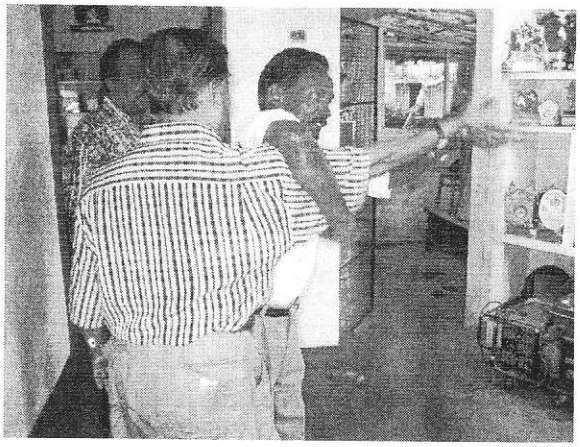
Traveling

To allow more flexibility in our travels we elected to avoid the restriction of bus and train schedules and hired a car for the duration. Our plan was to spend several days in Trivandrum where to visit the local museums to nearby locales to visit and interview local fighting arts instructors.

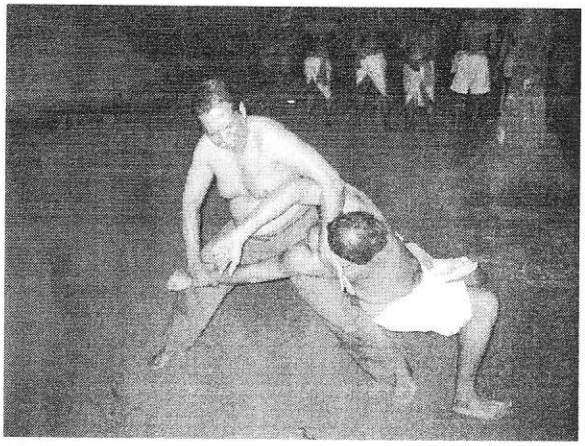
We began work at the home of of Moses Thilak where we interviewed Dr. Manickavasagam, a history professor who specializes on *varmam*, an Indian system of body energy points analogous to the points and meridians utilized in Chinese acupuncture and fighting arts. Prof. Manickavasagam has completed a manuscript on *varmam* that provides some important background information on this ancient system of health and combat, Assisting in the interview was a gentleman by the name of Desmond Nettu, a local official in the police department. Mr. Nettu has been doing studies on *varma*, and was able to provide additional important historical and cultural insights on the background of the development of *varma*.

[1] Tragically, Moses Thilak Sensei passed away on 4 January 2004.

[2] First published in Great Britain as *The Way of the Warrior*, Century Publishing Co., 1983.



Dr. Manickavasagam (l) demonstrating a joint lock on Karuna.



Richard *Assan* demonstrating shoulder joint lock.

While Dr. Manickavasagam's primary research is in the history and background of *varmam*, he also has a solid working knowledge of its technical application. During the interview, he demonstrated a number of the simpler applications of *varmam* combative techniques.

Shortly after the interview with Dr. Marickavasagam, we visited the Maharajah's Palace Museum, which has a fairly large collection of weapons. This museum is actually a section of the Maharajah's palace in Trivandrum that has been sectioned off for use as a museum. It has only been open for the past few years, and overall the museum is nicely maintained.

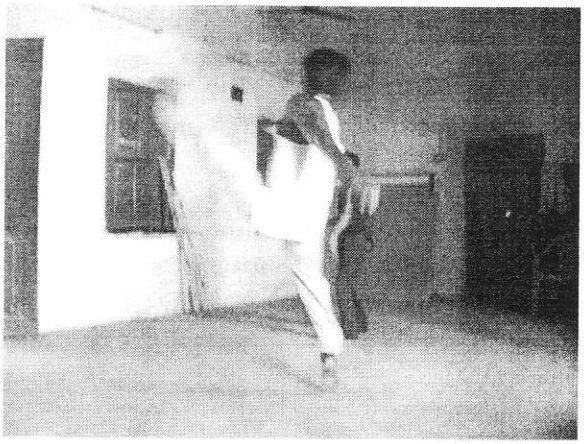
In contrast to the rest of the museum, however, the extensive collection of weapons apparently receives little or no care; the weapons are essentially just piled together in various storage areas, rusting away. The museum has a wide variety of swords and other bladed weapons as well as spears, shields and other weapons from all over India. It would be a worthy project to clean, assess, and categorize these weapons, not to mention arrange proper storage. Unfortunately, there is little to no funding available for that type of project.

Our First *Kalari*

In the evening, we visited our first *kalari* (training place). This was the *kalari* of Richard Standon, an *assan* (instructor) of southern *kalaripayattu*. Most traditional *kalari* are indoors, but Richard *Assan*'s is outdoors. His group presented an interesting display of general *kalaripayattu* training.

The training in Richard *Assan*'s *kalari* is generally done in the evening under the light of torches. In the training the students practiced a variety of weapons and empty-hand training drills.

On the day following our visit to Richard *Assan*'s *kalari*, we traveled south through Kerala and into Tamil Nadhu to the town Nagar Coil. There, Moses Thilak had arranged for demonstrations and interviews with five *silambam* teachers and their students from the area.

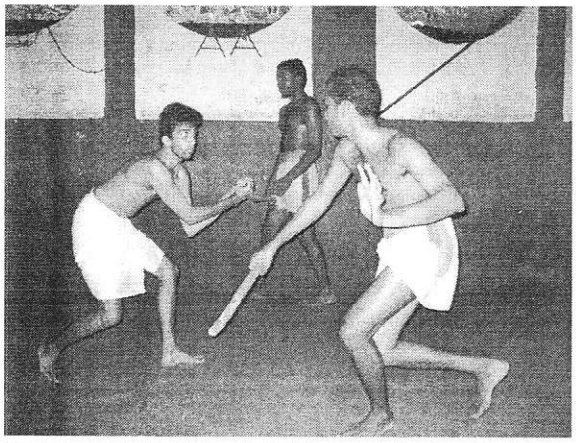


Nagar Coil - *Silambam.*

Silambam is basically a Tamil stick fighting system, but often includes other weapons and empty hand techniques as well. The instructors were an interesting group, representing a range of socio-economic positions from laborers to civil service bureaucrats. It was evident as well that two or three of the instructors had fortified themselves ahead of time with toddy. It's unclear how that affected performances, but it did to make for lively interviews.

Although the language and culture of Tamil Nadu and Kerala are related, there are some strong distinctions,

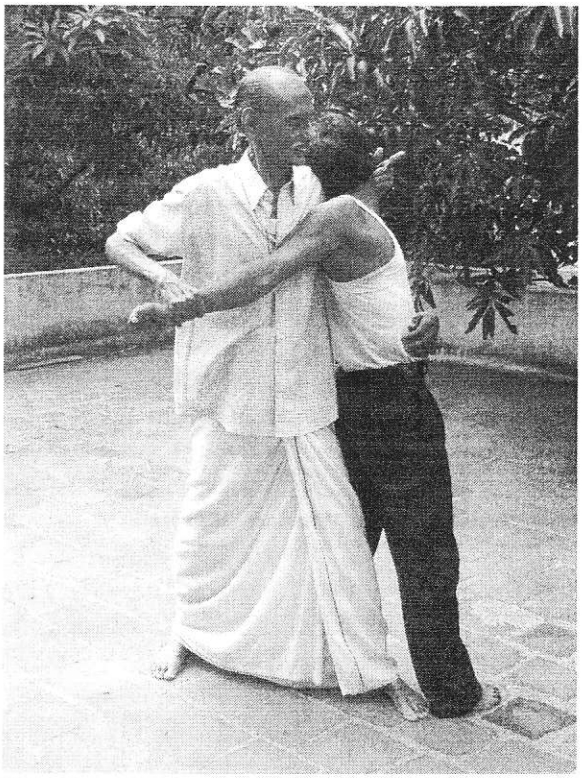
and this is strongly reflected in their respective fighting arts. This is not the place for a discourse on this topic, but suffice it to say that the traditional functional ends for the two systems—*kalaripayattu* and *silambam*—appear to have been quite distinct at one time. While perhaps still somewhat premature to make a definitive judgement, from the research we've done so far, it's becoming apparent that Kerala's *kalaripayattu* traditionally was a sanctioned dueling system, often utilized to settle disputes between various rankings rulers. In contrast, the *silambam* of Tamil Nadu seems to have been developed more as a civilian self-defense system. While the two systems do share some common traits, there are important distinctions, chief of which is the types of weapons used. *Kalaripayattu* makes extensive use of battlefield weapons, such as sword and shield, spear, and various other lethal striking weapons. *Silambam* does make some use of swords, spears, etc., however, they seem to put their greatest emphasis on the long stick or staff.



Training at Vasudevan's *kalari*.

Another major area of difference is the complex structure of training and education in *kalaripayattu*. In short, it was originally a system that was best practiced by full time professionals. Even today there is an extensive and well structured training syllabus. The training hall itself—*kalari*—has a prescribed size and shape, and exists as a foundational core to the educational and training goals of the system. In *silambam*, there appears to be somewhat less structure to the system, perhaps reflecting a greater emphasis on the less structured demands of agricultural village self-defense. *Kalaripayattu* and the *kalari* reflect the well defined structure of the organized duel that was the functional end of the training. Likewise, *silambam* contains the attributes that would make it a survival adaptive system for self-protection, protection of the family, and in defense of the village.

There are basically three regional styles of *kalaripayattu* - southern, northern, and central. Currently, one of the major northern schools is located in the village of Kaduthuruthi, about five hours' drive north of Trivandrum. This is the *kalari* of Vasudevan *Gurukkal*. Vasu *Gurukkal* (teacher) is the epitome of the "spiritual" type of *kalaripayattu gurukkal*. About 72 years old, he has become internationally known from his exposure in a BBC documentary on Asian fighting arts and follow-up book by Reid & Croucher book based on the documentary, both of which came out some years ago. Vasu *Gurukkal* is also an ayurvedic physician, and his clinic is located within the *kalari*. People come from literally hundreds of kilometers around for treatment. We spent about three days at the *kalari*, where we interviewed Vasudevan *Gurukkal* and observed a number of training sessions.



Balanchanrdan *Gurukkal* (l) demonstrating on student.

The typical *kalaripayattu* training is incredibly strenuous. It puts extreme emphasis on stamina, agility, and flexibility. It is some of the most demanding physical training that I have witnessed. If there is a weak side in the physical aspects of training, it is perhaps a lack in the development of strength. While the technical skills are impressive for speed and fluidity of movement, I would

have to say that they are generally deficient at targeting-timing-distancing. Most likely, this is a relatively recent weakness, developing out of the lack of real application over the last fifty years.

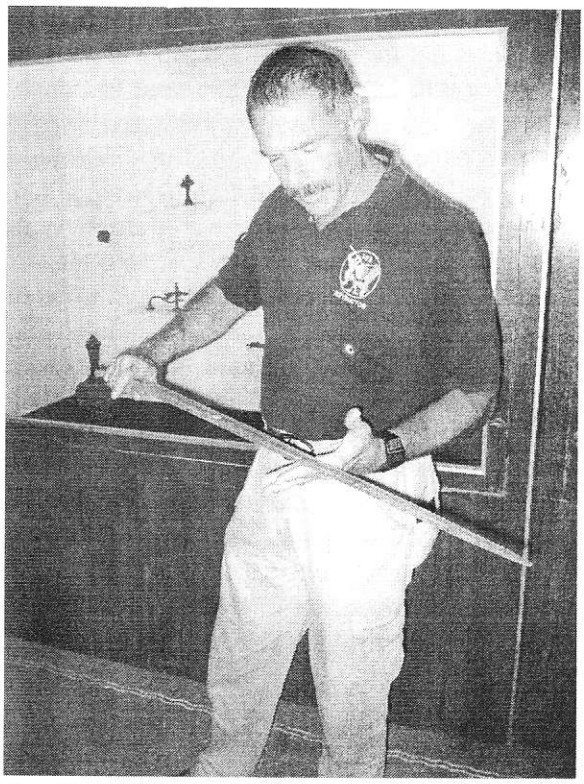
Another northern style *kalari* is located in the town of Palakad. It is the *kalari* of Balanchandran *Gurukkal*. Interestingly, Balanchandran *Gurukkal* has some local fame for a cutting skill that he demonstrated for us. He can cut a straight palm leaf stalk into three pieces in one stroke. We witnessed him perform the feat, and while it doesn't have much combative application, it was an impressive exhibition of dexterity with a blade.

From northern Kerala we moved into the neighboring state of Tamilnadu and the city of Coimbatore. As mentioned previously, the predominant Tamil fighting art is *silambam*. We were fortunate to meet with Rajamani *Assan*, a *silambam* instructor (in *silambam* the instructors are generally called *assan* as versus *gurukkal*). Rajamani *Assan*, a police inspector, also instructs in *gusti*, Indian grappling. He and his students demonstrated both their *silambam* and *gusti*. Rajamani *Assan* also teaches some of the *gusti* techniques to the police as a form of defensive tactics.

While in Coimbatore, we had the pleasure of meeting met Dr. Maheswaran, an anthropologist and curator of the Government Museum at Erode. Dr. Maheswaran's specialty area is weapons, and he had fairly recently uncovered a cache of 4,000 year-old copper and bronze antennae-hilted swords. These blades are currently on display at the Government Museum at Coimbatore. These weapons are a remarkable find, and in great condition considering their age. Maheswaran is providing an article on them for publication in *Hoplos*.

From Coimbatore we went back to northern Kerala and to the small town of Vadagara. There we were met by Mr. Sunil, a practitioner of both modern sport karate and a student of *kalaripayat*.

Mr. Sunil took us on an early morning visit to a small village in which is located area one of the oldest *kalari* around. The physical structure is over a hundred years, but no one is quite sure how long the site was used as a *kalari*. It is no longer being used for training, but has been converted into a Hindu temple.



Handling 4,000 year-old, bronze, antennae-hilted sword.

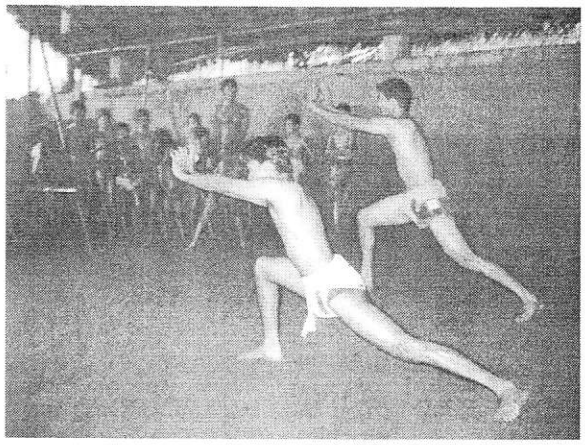
Later, on the same day as the visit to the *kalari*/ temple, we met Mr. Sunil's father, Balan *Gurukkal*, now 72 years old, certainly one of the more interesting *kalaripayattu gurukkal* we would run into. Balan *Gurukkal* is one of the few teachers still alive with documented combat experience. He had a quite different slant on the use of fighting techniques and weapons from most of the other teachers we had seen up to this point, and was able to provide some insights that shed some light on a somewhat older practice of *kalaripayattu*.

As with any combative systems that are currently still being practiced around the world, *kalaripayattu* in general has been and is evolving to adapt to changes in the culture in which it resides. Just as modern karate-do is quite different from the old Okinawan karate-jutsu from which it derived, it became evident to us that *kalaripayattu* has made similar adaptations. Balan *Gurukkal*'s *kalaripayattu* harkened back to a time when the system was used for something other than exercise and sport.

Balan *Gurukkal* (rt) demonstrating empty-hand technique against weapons with Karuna.

Still in the general area of Vadagara in northern Kerala, we visited another small village area to visit two local *kalari*. These are both old style *kalari* structures, built partly underground. One was the Ankam *kalari* which is used by a group of more modern style teachers. The training that we watched was instructed by Suresh *Gurukkal*, age 46. The second *kalari* we visited was the Kadathanar *kalari*, under Raghavan *Gurukkal*, age 67. Raghavan *Gurukkal* is essentially from the same lineage as Balan *Gurukkal*, and maintained a similarly functional orientation.

We watched the training at both these *kalari*, and did interviews with both Suresh *Gurukkal* and Raghavan *Gurukkal*, and by this time it is becoming very apparent that there is a distinct difference between the approaches of the younger (under 55) and older *gurukkal*. Perhaps due to my own bias, I was more impressed with the older teachers such as Vasudevan, Balan, and Raghavan. Individually, Vasu and Balan are of totally different character types themselves, yet both exhibit what I would call a greater understanding of the realities of combat than the younger teachers with whom we met. It might simply be due to that fact that all the old fellows had their share of fights, while the younger teachers in general denied that type of experience.



Early morning training at the Ankam *kalari*. Note the grass above the tops of the wall.

Also in Vadagara, we met with still another instructor of *kalaripayattu,* Kunhimoosa *Gurukkal*. He was the first and only Muslim *gurukkal* we were to meet. Like many of the *gurukkal*, Kunhimoosa *Gurukkal* operates a small ayurvedic healing clinic; unlike any of the others, he also runs a small weight training gym. Fairly well off, he runs his clinic in a small office on the bottom of small commercial building, and his gym in a not much bigger space on the fifth floor. His *kalari* is in a room next door to the gym, and is just barely large enough for training. He does, however, have a large and enthusiastic group of students, predominantly Hindu, with some Muslims. His teaching is probably the most modern and altered of any we've seen, having added karate punches and kicks to some of the empty-hand portions of *kalaripayattu*. While certainly not a traditionalist, he is a very dedicated to his group, and is very supportive of his students.

We left Kerala again, heading northeast up the Deccan Plateau for Mysore in the state of Karnataka. There we were hosted by Jaideep Bhale Rao, one of Moses Thilak's associates. Mr. Rao has extensive martial contacts throughout the area, and thanks to his efforts we were able to view an incredible weapons collection as well as meet with authorities and instructors of other types of Indian combative systems.

One of the first we met was Dr. Arun, a healer and Indian martial arts researcher. Oddly enough, he is locally known as "Karate Arun," even though he does not practice karate. Some time ago, Dr. Arun worked in Germany as an engineer, and on the side he assisted with a German taekwondo team as a kind of team trainer. Evidently, from that experience he gained the reputation back in Mysore as a karate man.

LR: Karunakaran, Moses Thilak, Krishna Jetti, Armstrong, Dr. "Karate" Arun.

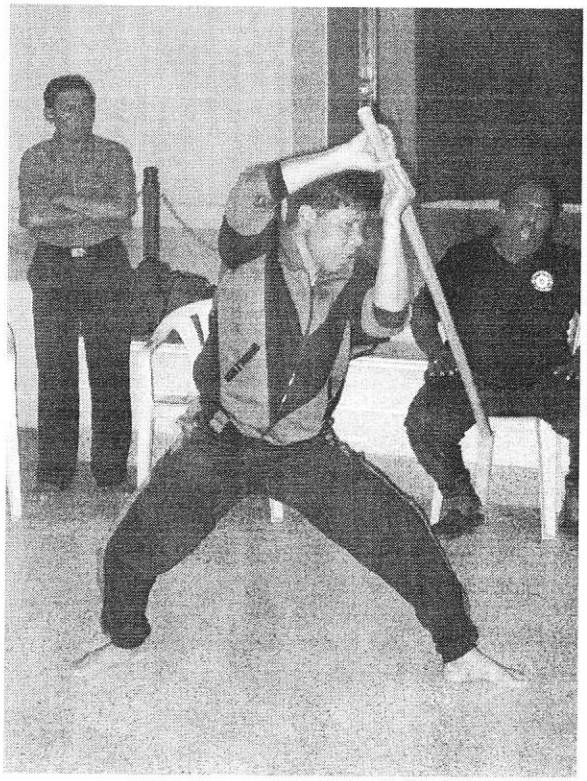
More interesting to us is the work Dr. Arun has done on two other Indian arts: Vajra Mushti and Thang Ta, neither of which is native to this area of India. Vajra Mushti is essentially a knuckle duster fighting ritual and Thang Ta is a weapon system from Manipur in the north eastern portion of India.

In our first meeting with Dr. Arun, he introduced us to Krishna Jetti (75), one of few remaining traditional teachers of *Vajra Mushti*. In our interview, we learned that *Vajra Mushti* is still being practiced to some extent, and is still performed before the Maharajah on special occasions, albeit discretely so.

At our next meeting Dr. Arun introduced us to Anju Singh, a Thang Ta teacher from Manipur who now lives in Mysore. Thang Ta is primarily a weapons system that includes sword & shield, two-hand sword, spear, as well as other weapons. While there is some empty hand grappling in the system, it is a secondary aspect. Thang Ta appears to be more functional as a warfare system than as village self-defense. When asked, Singh admitted that it is still occasionally used for real fighting in Manipur.

Our meeting with Mr. Singh signaled the end our time allotment, and from Mysore we made our way back to Trivandrum and eventually back home.

Although relatively short—three weeks—this trip was one of most productive field trips I have been on. In that period, we drove over 2100 km (1300 miles) from the southern tip of India in Tamilnadu, through the length of Kerala, and up to Mysore in Karnataka.



Mr. Anju Singh demonstrating Thang Ta swordsmanship.

Realistically, it was a survey field trip. While we were not able to accomplish any in-depth research, we were able to gain a rough idea of how extensive Indian traditional fighting arts are in even the relatively limited area we traveled through. In that area alone, we interviewed over 20 teachers, took over a thousand photos, and we took about 50 video clips. Needless to say, it is apparent that Indian traditional fighting systems have been greatly neglected. This is an area of study that must be taken care of in the very near future. The danger in India, as in other cultures, is that the culture is rapidly changing. It is vital that the traditional systems be thoroughly researched now, before they evolve and are changed forever.

In regards to *kalaripayattu*, it is a very interesting and somewhat unique traditional fighting system of Kerala. The uniqueness lies partly in its background as a sanctioned dueling system. This needs to be studied much further before definite conclusions can be made, and this must be done fairly soon as well, or the information will be lost forever. Interestingly, in interviews with the various *kalaripayattu gurukkal*, we could discover no one who seemed to have any information regarding traditional documents on *kalaripayattu* that

were much more than a hundred years old. Most of the history on *kalaripayattu* that we heard or could find was based on relatively recent oral traditions with virtually no documentational backup. Hopefully future field work will be successful at discovering such documentation. In the meantime, efforts should be made to make written record of the current generation of oral tradition.

As with all cultural systems of behavior and performance, the traditional systems of India will evolve and adapt to match changing functions. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but it does make difficult the study of their older variants. At the same time, we should be recording how and why these changes occur. In India, we have a tremendous opportunity to study the evolution of combative systems. Many of the traditional Indian systems still maintain examples that are close to their original structures, and it is only relatively recently that they have been impacted by the modern technological world.

Cross-training: Classical Chinese and Japanese Systems

Liam Keeley's thoughts on practicing two classical traditions: Chen Style *Taijiquan* and Tatsumi Ryu *heihō*.

Question: *You have trained long term in two* koryu bugei *(Japanese "old tradition martial arts"), and Chen style* taijiquan*; what effect do see of one style upon the other?*

I think there has been some effect, and I think it has been helpful. On the other hand, I don't think my Tatsumi Ryu would be dramatically different from what it is now, if I had never done *taiji*. Note that when I talk about *taiji*, I am referring to Chen style, which in my opinion has an entirely different approach from, say, Yang style. I did Yang style for a few years, but it had minimal effect on me. I imagine my Tatsumi Ryu *iai* (solo sword practice that starts with drawing the sword from the scabbard) is where the effect of Chen *taiji* is most obvious. I see the role of *iai* practice as similar to the *taiji* forms in that free of the constraints imposed by facing a partner, one can concentrate on aspects of one's art other than the immediate necessities of a conflict situation. In other words, it is a chance to work on breathing, body movement and posture without distractions.

Caveats

However, I have to say that I enjoy watching any kind of body movement, human or animal, trying to make sense of what I see. I have always had an interest in this, not that I'm unique in this: Humans seem to have a highly developed ability for the assessment of body movement. Just think of the number of people who enjoy watching sporting events of every description, action movies, etc.

Probably my interest in such things increased under the influence of Donn Draeger. It was very stimulating being around him. Apart from my interest in physical anthropology, stuff like the influence of environment on typical body builds, and the relationship between body build and preferred weapons and weapons use, I have picked up quite a lot of ideas over the years from other arts and sports. In terms of theory of body movement, the sport which has influenced me most in recent years is tennis. I started playing tennis about 5 or 6 years ago, and found a lot of similarities between movement concepts in tennis on how to generate power and Chen *taiji* theory. Incidentally, I would characterize Tatsumi Ryu as a *xingi* (*hsing-i*) type system (key concept: a breaking wave). This is mainly because of the limitations incurred by centering on the two handed sword.

Body Movement

At one stage I found that many of the corrections I was getting from my Tatsumi Ryu teachers coincided with what my *taiji* teacher, Yamaguchi Hakuei *Sensei*, was saying. For example, being too tense in the muscles around the kneecap, which was having a breaking effect on the transfer of weight leading to loss of potential power/impact, both in my *taiji* and *iai*. I should mention that the traditional mode of practice for *iai* in Tatsumi Ryu is for the teacher/senior student to model the *kata*, which is then repeated by the other students to the best of their ability.

My corrections in Tatsumi Ryu were mostly from Kato Hiroshi *Sensei*, who would usually explain far more than his father, Takashi *Sensei*. Takashi *Sensei* taught in a very intuitive, or I suppose visual/nonverbal way, in that he would patiently demonstrate again and again, rather than explain verbally. Kato Takashi *Sensei* was very careful with corrections. For example, if you made a mistake in a sequence, for example, and he could see that you knew you had made a mistake, he would simply ignore it and carry on. He was very careful not too overcorrect, or to correct beyond the trainee's current level of

ability to understand. Importantly, Takashi *Sensei* was always very positive rather than negative with his corrections. He was far more concerned with making sure one understood principles, not just intellectually, but in terms of being able to manifest them in one's movements. He also pointed out that there is a distinction between personal quirks, which are acceptable if they do not affect technique, and postural or biomechanical faults, which must be corrected.

Liam Keely (r) performing Tatsumi Ryu *waki* cut.

Breathing

Breathing techniques are not explicitly taught in Tatsumi Ryu, but seem to arise naturally through daily repetitive practice and observation of the teacher. I feel what I picked up about breath control through *taiji* essentially gave me a short cut, and perhaps a greater awareness of what I was doing. I definitely don't feel I am putting *taiji* breathing into Tatsumi Ryu. Awareness of different breathing patterns has given me a better feeling for where my center of gravity is at any one time, and a tool to control it.

Balance /Body movement

There are some obvious differences in posture/ stance between *taiji* and *koryu*: when one is locked into using a two handed sword one will have a different posture from someone who is unarmed or using a single-hand sword. However there is also a lot of over-lap. The basis of Tatsumi Ryu *iai* is walking, which is a pattern of body movement that pretty much defines us as human. Can't get much more natural than that. In the case of Chen "pushing-hands," while the first levels do not look particularly like walking, some of the advanced forms do. Finally I would say although there seems to be a tendency to use the *chien* (Chinese straight sword) with one hand—possibly as the result of using lighter swords and/or martial arts competitions—I was very interested to note that when Chen Xiao Wong *Sifu* taught us the Chen sword form some years ago, that the left hand was often used to support the sword hand.

Theory

Tatsumi Ryu has quite a lot of theory in the *makimono* (scrolls) that relates to ying/yang and similar esoterica. Given the East Asian cultural background in Chinese and Japanese classical systems, I would say there certainly are a fair amount of shared assumptions - Confucian, Daoist, (Yin-yang, Five elements, etc). Most sophisticated systems have a good understanding of the effects of gravity and the relationship to generating power. Although, since one cannot escape one's culture, each system may express its understanding of such things as centrifugal force in what may seem to us as quaint or esoteric. I have found tremendous depth in Tatsumi Ryu, and without going into too much detail, would say that there is a very sophisticated understanding of human body movement and psychology, both in the teachers' instructions and in surviving documents, including the *makimono*.

I should mention that I also practiced Okinawa Goju Ryu karate pretty intensively over 17 years. About five or six years of that was directly under Higaonna Morio *Sensei* in Tokyo. I still like Goju Ryu, and think if I was unexpectedly assaulted, it would be the first thing that came out, and would do the job. Having said that, my background in karate caused considerable interference with learning both Tatsumi Ryu and Chen *taiji*, since I had been doing Goju for about 17 years before I started them (1984 and 1986 respectively). In the case of Tatsumi Ryu, I found it hard to get away from the Goju Ryu *sanchin* stance and arcing-step patterns that I had internalised. I kept doing them when I should have been walking naturally. Eventually I was able to change to a stance that was more appropriate to using a weapon in a relatively linear fashion.

I imagine that there was a fair amount of change that occurred in the evolution of Miyagi Chojun's Goju from Higaonna Kanryo's Fukien Province martial arts. A key point, I believe, was Miyagi's conscious decision to stay

away from the incorporation of weapons into his style. Although I understand from Higaonna Morio *Sensei*, who is my main source on this, that Higaonna Kanryo was expert in the use of the *dao/ seiryutou* (curved, single-cutting edge sword). The decision to ignore weapons affects the principles of body movement in two ways: one is not oneself using a weapon; and one does not expect a weapon to be *used* against oneself. That is, the premise becomes a strictly "empty-hand" affair. The result of neglecting to consider the possibility of being attacked with a weapon, at least in the case of Goju Ryu, seems to have been an over emphasis on body conditioning, and a loss of mobility in terms of footwork, and an over reliance on absorbing punishment and the use of force-on-force blocks. It should be obvious that no amount of body conditioning will help you withstand a cut from a bladed weapon, let alone the impact of a missile such as an arrow or spear. Many karate force-on-force blocks will not work either against a bladed weapon or particularly against something like the traditional Okinawan weapons such as *sai* or *tonfa*.

The other karate-based problem that I encountered in learning *taiji*, (though not in Tatsumi Ryu), was that the intensity of training in Goju Ryu karate under Higaonna Morio *Sensei* had accustomed me to pushing my body to its limits. I think that if one continually does this—overriding signals of protest from one's body—you lose a certain sensitivity, which is then hard to get back. Or at least I found it be so. To generalize, I would say that the Chinese martial systems, at least the *internal* ones I am familiar with, place much more emphasis than the Japanese on what they call listening to one's body. I always think back to the remarks of Cheong Cheng Leong (the Phoenix-Eye Fist master in Penang, Malaysia) at a lunch he put on for Donn Draeger and the IHS Field research team in Penang in 1979. He commented that all decent systems need to develop *i* (intent, will, volition), *qi* (chi - internal power), and *li* (muscular or physical force) in a balanced manner. I would say my Goju Ryu training definitely helped me develop a certain amount of *li* and *i* (strength and neural drive), though possibly at the expense of other factors. I guess the moral is that one needs to vary one's training as much as possible. Sheer guts type training, mind numbing repetition, and technique training all have their place.

Tatsumi Ryu seems to handle this issue rather well. Many exponents cross train in kendo, so that they get in a fair amount of aerobic type training and repetition. And the curriculum has built into it training opportunities to test the students in the form of such training as *kazunuki*, in which students who have attained a certain level are required to perform 3,000 continuous repetitions of the two central *kata* of the *ryu*.

I still occasionally teach Goju Ryu for my brother-in-law, who has a *dojo* here in Melbourne. I find that my Chen style *taiji* has changed the flavor of my karate. I think it has given me a better appreciation of the *ju* (soft) side of Goju Ryu, for what that's worth.

Knowing and Doing

I think that experienced Chen people have a fantastic understanding of what they are doing, however, you don't necessarily have to have that understanding to do it. It certainly helps you as a teacher/coach, though. My point is that some people will naturally be good at certain things without necessarily having an intellectual understanding of the principles involved. There must be plenty of champion boxers who can't explain how they get power in their punches, for example. As well, any good system should emphasize whole body movement. And, finally, any system should end up as a hard/soft system, given time enough. A key factor is that intense repetitive practice, preferably under stress, should be done at least some of the time. A further factor for consideration is that today, free from historical constraints, we are able to pick and choose which arts, or which portions of our chosen art, interest us the most. For example, some may choose to spend a good deal of time on practicing say *shuriken-jutsu* (throwing-darts). I once asked Kato Takashi Sensei what he thought about selecting a fighting system to train in. He explained that it was a question of priorities. It would be foolish in the historical context to spend say fifty percent of one's available time in training something that would rarely be used. The majority of one's training time should be spent working with the weapons and techniques that one expected to use.

I don't see much problem in reconciling sophisticated systems which are well rounded and have a long, unbroken history. Thus systems like *taiji* and Tatsumi Ryu *heiho* have had the time (the past 400 or 500 years, with some kind of combative input from each generation until recently) to sort out any problems. Contradictions arise with half-baked systems based upon false premises, such as when a lineage is broken or perhaps only partly passed down, and improperly recreated by people who lack the required knowledge. Or in cases in which people with little or no personal experience of combat create their own systems.

I think taking on and practicing two very sophisticated systems from two distinct cultures is an extra-

ordinarily difficult thing to do, and rarely worth it. For my part, my motives for getting involved with Chen *taiji* was not necessarily to use it as a means of training for combat, since I felt that between the weapons training I had in the South African Army with modern weapons, Goju Ryu Karate, and Tatsumi Ryu, I had quite enough to go on. I started in Chen to get some insight into Chinese martial culture and thought, which would help broaden my hoplological perspective, through doing an extremely sophisticated Chinese art.

Given that one usually has limited time, I would say the best thing is to find a style you like, that has a nice variety of techniques that appeal to you, and stick to that. On the other hand, I have to admit that I didn't do that (Zulu stickfighting, anyone ?). The danger of doing too many arts is that one becomes mediocre at several things instead of good at one of them. Another point which I will not belabor, is the civil/martial dichotomy - the problems of practicing both civilian and martial based fighting arts.

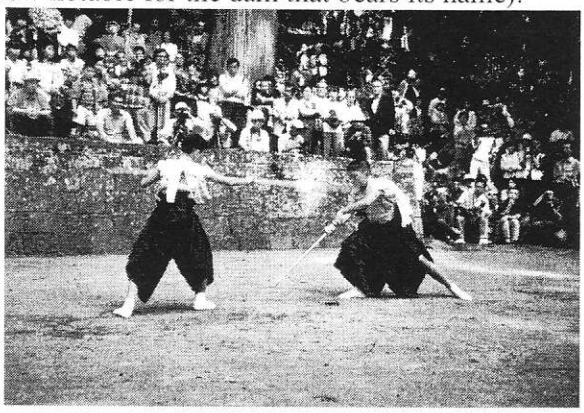
Liam Keeley is a board member of the International Hoplology Society. Originally from South Africa and currently residing in Australia, he lived in Japan for over twenty years. As well as an extensive background in both modern and classical Japanese martial and civil fighting systems, Liam has been training in Chen style *taijiquan*, and has trained and done research in Zulu stickfighting.

Mishima Bojutsu: Japan's Oldest Martial Tradition?

Antony Cundy

Chiba Prefecture, bordering as it does the great Kanto plains, and possessing one of the most important martial shrines in Japan, Katori Jingu, is also home to such classical traditions as Tenshin Shoden Katori Shinto Ryu, Tatsumi Ryu, Ishiguro Ryu and the Shirai Ryu. It is not surprising then that in the deepest heart of this peninsula is a martial tradition that is older than any of the aforementioned systems, yet today not practiced in quite the same manner.

In 1180, Minamoto Yoritomo (1147-1199) landed on the Chiba peninsula, and led his troops through the Kazusa lands, presently the cities of Kisarazu and Kimitsu, gathering followers in the process. During this march, Yoritomo marched around Tokyo Bay to Kamakura, where he created the martial government known as the Bakufu. Legend has it that some warriors in the Yoritomo train became detached from the main group and found themselves lost in the mountainous Mishima area (now notable for the dam that bears its name).

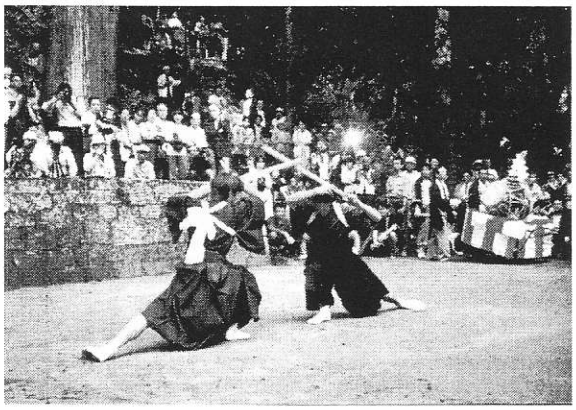


Young boys performing bo vs sword at Mishima Shrine.

It was from this group of warriors that the people of the Mishima area were taught a system of *bojutsu* ("staff art") with which to defend themselves and their land in return for their excellent hospitality.

It was not in self defense however, but as a social and religious act that these bojutsu techniques were first performed in the precincts of the Mishima Shrine. Social in that it offered a chance for the young men of the region to show their manly prowess, and religious as it was believed that the performance of these forms acted to ward off evil spirits. There can be no doubt that the incorporation of this event as a religiously linked festival has led to its preservation into the 21st century.

To this day, every year on the 28th of September, the martial skills of the Mishima area youths are displayed in performances that combine the music and rhythm of folk dancing with the weapons, distancing and techniques of classical martial traditions. The Bo Kakko Mai, as it is correctly referred to, is a festival of two parts, one a series of martial demonstrations, the other a symbolic dance in which a lion is defeated by crafty locals. It is, of course, the former that interests the hoplologist.



Sword vs sword at Mishima Shrine.

Demonstrations are predominantly of two person forms and pit a large variety of weapons against each other. We see performances of *naginata* vs. *naginata*, staff vs. staff, staff vs. sword, sword vs. sword, umbrella vs. sword, and fan vs. sword. All demonstrations are performed to the accompaniment of drums, flutes and whistles, all of which keep time for the demonstrators.

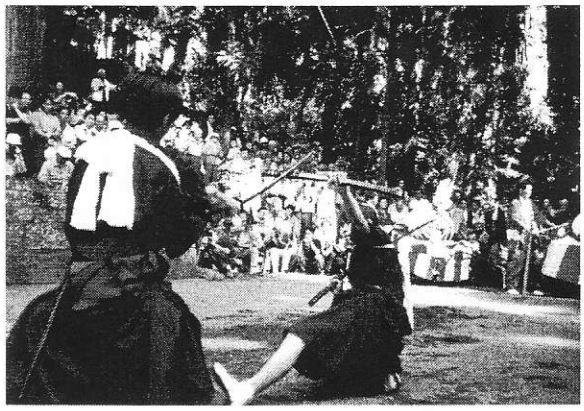
Local preservation society records dating from the 9th year of Kanbun (1669) suggest there were two *ryuha* (schools/traditions) in the area at that time: the Shinto Ryu Marubashi-ha, which, based on the martial history of the region, one must presume is a splinter group of the Katori Shinto Ryu, and the Asayama Ichiden Ryu. In addition, the region also saw the later introduction of the Hasumi Ryu and the Tabara Ryu. Interestingly, Watatani Kiyoshi, in his *Bugei Ryuha Daijiten*, refers to the arts performed at the Mishima Shrine as being of the Ohashi Ryu.

These *ryuha* have undoubtedly influenced the contents of the various demonstrations of skill, timing, physical prowess, and martial technique. However, it is almost impossible to tell now which techniques are from what tradition and which are the original staff techniques that were taught by Yoritomo's hapless warriors. There are, however, strong clues to at least some of the origins of the later sword techniques.

In performance, demonstrators enter the prepared area—a patch of ground in front of the main shrine building—and squat down in the familiar kendo squat called *sonkyo*, with their weapons laid down in front of them. As a senior member purifies the ground with salt, with both hands, each demonstrator picks up some earth from the ground in front of him, and, swinging his arms across his body, throws the dirt in opposite directions. Having done this, both practitioners pick up their weapons and commence their demonstration, marking time with the rhythm of the music.

Interestingly all practitioners tie their sleeves up with the *tasuki*, a cord or ribbon that wraps around the shoulders forming a figure of eight, which is tied at the rear. In modern demonstrations of *koryu*, this practice is now rarely performed, and is usually limited to naginata traditions.

The *bojutsu* techniques are long staff techniques, which immediately suggest the more martial focus and origins of the techniques, in comparison with the half-staffing techniques that belong to the realm of combative sports and quasi martial arts. Interesting characteristics include launching strikes off of the shoulders and techniques in which the demonstrator relinquishes his weapon in order to render his opponent incapacitated. The staff is also sometimes discarded and the clash with the sword wielding opponent continues with other weapons such as the fan.



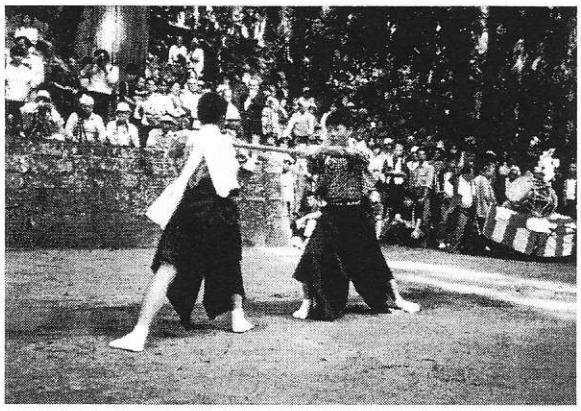
Blocking a sword strike with a sheathed sword at Mishima Shrine.

The umbrella vs sword demonstration is also interesting. Here the umbrella is used in ways that one would likely imagine, i.e. blocking and jamming incoming cuts, as well as less martially applicable ways, such as rhythmical sweeps of the opponent legs. These sweeps are defeated by dramatic leaps that draw to mind the martial acrobatics of Indian *kalaripayattu* practitioners. The forms are concluded by the opening of the umbrella whose paper covering is cut through by the sword wielding demonstrator.

It should also be pointed out that in many of the forms, live blades are utilized, and a number of the forms are finished with a demonstration of the cutting strength of the demonstrators as they attempt to cut through their partners' bamboo staffs, which are about 8 cm in diameter. It goes without saying that this use of live blades lends itself to heightened concentration.

The final performance of these martial dances is performed by two older members of the group, and is very different from those seen before. First the two practitioners perform the same purification of the performance area as done earlier. Then, they couch their wooden swords along the inside of their arm, in a manner similar to that of a sentry guard, and walk past each other. Reaching the opposite end of the performance area, the two practitioners turn to face each other and flamboyantly present their weapons.

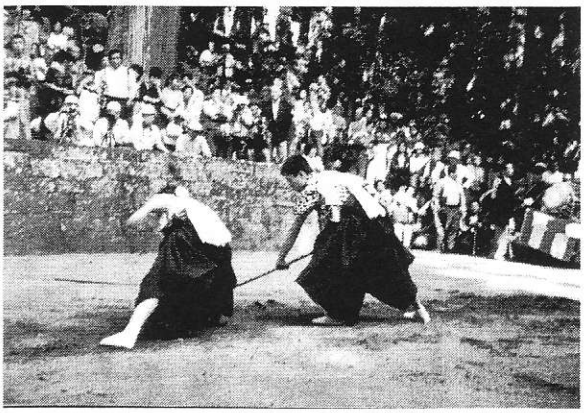
Following the impetus of the drums and whistles that mark time around them, each of the two opponents twirls his weapon in a one-handed fanning action in front of his body, and then performs several practice strikes. These are all performed while rhythmically swaying from one leg to the other and raising the knees quite high. Several clashes are then performed in the same melodramatic manner. All actions are made with the same dancing movements; these movements gradually build in speed as the music increases tempo.



Mishima Shrine - Sword vs sword.

What is highly interesting about these techniques is the manner of striking with the sword and the parts of the body targeted. Immediately noticeable in the striking movements is that they are short and abbreviated versions of what is normally referred to as *makiuchi* ("winding strike"), in which the blade is delivered through the unfurling and rolling down action of the arms from a position beside the head. This sees the blade move from the rear of the left shoulder through an arch into a forward strike. This is a highly idiosyncratic striking technique that is now only seen in the *kenjutsu* portion of the Katori Shinto Ryu.

Secondly, the insides of the elbows are targeted through strikes delivered from below in a style very similar to the *ōgasumi* techniques of the Katori Shinto Ryu. This would tend to give further evidence of Katori Shinto Ryu influence on Mishima *bo* techniques.



Mishima Shrine - *bo* defeating sword.

The performers of the Mishima Bo techniques that are demonstrated annually at the Bo Kakko Mai festival do not practice year around. Instead the local males are brought together a couple of months before the festival and are instructed in the forms by the elders of the area. Thus one would think that there would be a lack of timing, intent and martial credibility. This however is not the case. These forms offer a fascinating glimpse into classical combative techniques that are usually only visible in performances of the two extant traditions of comparable age - the Katori Shinto Ryu and the Maniwa Nen Ryu.

Although undoubtedly the techniques of the festival are melodramatic and primarily designed for an aesthetic appearance, it is my opinion that the essentials of the original weapon usage have been retained, at least in part. We cannot, of course, classify the *bojutsu* of Mishima in the same way that we do the major extant *ryuha* of Japan. It has certainly not maintained the level of integrity and focused study and practice that is seen in regularly practiced *koryu* traditions. However, the Bo Kakko Mai festival should still be considered as an important resource for those interested in researching the classical martial traditions of Japan.

The Comments of a Commander of Professionals

Lt. Col. George Bristol, USMC

The practice of *koryu bujutsu* remains a core tenet of my life as a warrior. Looking at the many aspects covered in *koryu* training, I realize again that such training brings many things to different people.

In a discussion recently, I mentioned a boiled down philosophy that we use in the Recon Battalion that may apply to an understanding of combative capability.

The men I am honored to serve with are tough young Americans who do what I consider the hardest job in the Corps: small group operations forward of friendly lines. They are a tightly knit, determined group who inspire in me immense pride and affection, though I am very hard on them. Our training is what it must be—physically and mentally—to be able to do our mission. Like any commander, I have my own philosophy of what it takes to succeed.

Much of what my philosophy has become is a result of my past experiences, my training, and, I am always quick to say, my interpretation of the tenets of our koryu and what it teaches me. While I do not speak to the Marines in terms of *koryu*, I do promulgate my philosophy from its "New Shadow."

I tell them that it takes three things to be a Reconnaissance Marine:

1) **professionalism** - it all starts there. No badges displayed, no bragging, just quiet, unyielding professionalism. If you are professional, you will eliminate the threat, protect the force, and accomplish the assigned mission.

2) **hard feet** - if your feet are hard and tough, then so is your body. Flashy muscles don't mean much on the 6th day of a 10 day patrol. Hard feet count - feet that will take you where your brothers need you, any time, any place. Day after day, year after year, keep moving and hardening your feet. Your body—and your will—harden as well over time.

3) **gunfighter mentality** - when a weapon is in play, know how to use it. Also know when not to use it and don't play with it or display it. Be a gunfighter - well schooled in the tools of the trade and honed to an edge that allows you to remain calm and collected. "There is no second place winner in a gunfight." If you pull it, use it. If you use it, use it for what it was designed for.

My best to all.

A long time member of the IHS and contributor to Hop-Lite, Lt. Col. Bristol is currently serving in Iraq.

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The Hoplite's Bookshelf

Constant Battles: The Myth of the Peaceful, Noble Savage

Steven A. LeBlanc with Kathrine E. Register
Published by St Martin's Press, 2003.

Reviewed by Neil Phillips

Ever since the beginning of man there has been conflict over resources, which in turn has lead to warfare. Today there is much talk about the threat of terrorism and especially suicide bombings, with various societies asking the same question "*Why*". The answer to *why* warfare exists today is addressed in *Constant Battles*.

Steven LeBlanc, an archaeologist, started to become aware of prehistoric warfare patterns, and their relationship with the carrying capacity of regions to support humans, during archaeological digs in the 1970's. He notes that little scholarly effort has been devoted to understand *why* so much warfare has taken place throughout human history and many in the academic community are of the opinion that warfare has had little impact and relevance to human history. After thirty years research Steven LeBlanc has written an interesting book which in my view provides a good starting point for those interested in hoplology. Understanding *why* different elements of society fight provides a good starting point for learning and understanding more about weapons and combative systems.

The author relies on factual evidence to support his views that humans have been unable to live in ecological balance, thus competition for resources and survival have

inevitably led to warfare. From reports on the finding of Otzi—the "Ice Man" who is more than five thousand years old—with a fatal arrowhead in his chest, to more recent accounts of Australian Aboriginal warfare in the1800s and infanticide practices, the reader is alerted to important factual evidence associated with warfare. Of particular interest is the way in which the author presents the concept of the three main levels of social structure: *tribes*, *chiefdoms*, and *states*, and shows how each deals with warfare and prisoners. The book also contains some interesting accounts of research on our closest relatives, the chimpanzees, who are one of the few mammals that fight in groups against other groups, deliberately and methodically attacking chimpanzees from other groups, and killing them... that is, engaging in warfare.

After reading the book, I support the author's view that by understanding why people fought in the past, modern humans can better seek to avoid warfare and the depletion of the environment in the future. *Constant Battles* is a good introduction to understanding the history of warfare. The book is well written and recommended to those interested in past and present warfare. The following quote by the author is worth further consideration:

"*The human inability to live in stable resource balance almost guarantees warfare*"

Recent IHS Library Acquisitions

Staff

"Star"code:

★★★★★	Must reading
★★★★	Recommended reading
★★★	Resource Value
★★	Questionable value
★	Little value

★★★★★ LeBlanc, Steven A. and Register, Katherine. 2003. ***Constant Battles: The Myth of the Peaceful, Noble Savage***. NY: St. Martin's Press. 271 pp.

Along the lines of Lawrence Keeley's *War Before Civilization*, this book provides important archaeological perspectives in the into constancy of human conflict and how the nature of human combative behavior is articulated by the structural level of the society in which it resides.

★★★★ Turnbull, Stephen. 2002. ***The Samurai Source Book***. London: Cassell & Co. 320 pp.

This is probably the most useful book to come from Turnbull, one of the most prolific writers on Samurai topics. This book is almost a small encyclopedia of prominent people, places, and events in Japan's martial history.

★★★ Amdur, Ellis. 2002. ***Old School: Essays on Japanese Martial Traditions***. Bothell, WA: Edgework. 275 pp.

In this collection of essays, Mr. Amdur provides some interesting and valuable information on several classical traditions as well on several different weapons. His essay on the development of the *naginata* is well done, and there is also some good information on two not-so-common weapons, *chigiriki* and *kusari-gama*. The only real downside to this book is the section on "warrior women," which blurs the meaning of "warrior" to include both legendary characters and participants in modern combative sports.

★★★ Balakrishnan, P. 2003. ***Kalarippayattu: The Ancient Martial Art of Kerala***. Calicut: Poorna Publications. 152 pp.

This book, though relatively short, provides a fairly comprehensive description on Kalarippayattu. It does include good photos, but unfortunately, too much space is devoted to descriptions of movement and

technique. For the non-practitioner, the amount of detailed instruction is virtually useless.

★★★ Cohen, Richard. 2002. ***By The Sword: A History of Gladiators, Musketeers, Swashbucklers, and Olympic Champions***. NY: Random House. 519 pp.

An historical treatise on (predominantly Western) swordsmen and swordsmanship from the perspective of a modern Western fencer. There is a chapter on Japanese swordsmanship, but as usual the material is taken from pop sources.

★★★ French, Shannon E. 2003. ***The Code of the Warrior: Exploring Warrior Values Past and Present***. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. 258 pp.

An unfortunately uninspired and overly academic approach to the topic of the warrior's code by a professor who teaches on the subject at the United States Naval Academy.

★★★ Tanaka, Fumon. 2003. ***Samurai Fighting Arts: The Spirit and the Practice***. Tokyo: Kodansha International. 230 pp.

Nicely illustrated with black & white photos, this is primarily a pop coverage of "samurai" fighting arts.

★★ Man, Kam Lo. 2001. ***Police Kung Fu: The Personal Combat Handbook of the Taiwan National Police***. Boston: Tuttle. 124 pp.

This is basically a Wing Chun approach to law enforcement defensive tactics.

★ Tarver, D.E. 2003. ***The Way of the The Living Sword: The Secret Teachings of Yagyu Munenori***. Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, Inc. 47pp.

Simply put, this book is best avoided.

INTERNATIONAL HOPLOLOGY SOCIETY

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION INFORMATION

Membership in the IHS, which includes subscriptions to *Hoplos, the Journal Of The International Hoplology Society*, and *Hop-Lite*, the IHS newsletter (one issue per year of *Hoplos* and at least 3 issues of *Hop-Lite*), are available for US$35 per year in the U.S., Canada, and overseas membership. Photocopies of back issues of *Hoplos* and *Hop-Lite* are available at US$7.00 and $5.00 per issue respectively. Individual articles may also be ordered at US$2.50 to cover postage and handling. Please send fees in U.S. funds only.

	USA and Canada	Foreign
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IHS/ICS MONOGRAPHS AND MANUALS

(Monograph: $12.50 (plus $2.50 for s&h .)

The DFD Monographs are transcriptions of lectures presented by Donn F. Draeger in the late 1970's and early 80's.

Donn F. Draeger Monograph Series No. 1: "Kiai: The Role of Sound in Japanese Martial Arts & Ways;" "Makimono: Japanese Handscrolls"

Donn F. Draeger Monograph Series No. 2 : "Ranking Systems in Japanese Martial Arts: Modern vs Classical;" "Bujutsu and Budo"

Donn F. Draeger Monograph Series No. 3: "Zen and the Japanese Warrior;" "Esoteric Buddhism in Japanese Warriorship"

Donn F. Draeger 1978 UH Lecture Series: "The Martial Arts and Ways of Japan, Part 1" (21 pages)

Donn F. Draeger 1978 UH Lecture Series: "The Martial Arts and Ways of Japan, Part 2" (28 pages)

Donn F. Draeger 1978 UH Lecture Series: "The Martial Arts and Ways of Japan, Part 3" (33 pages)

Donn F. Draeger 1978 UH Lecture Series: "The Martial Arts and Ways of Japan, Part 4" (35 pages)

Donn F. Draeger 1981 UH Lecture Series : "Belief Systems in Japanese Martial Culture, Part 1" (32 pages)

Richard Hayes - *Paleolithic Adaptive Traits and the Fighting Man* (37 pages)

Paul Nurse - *Sir Richard Francis Burton: the Doyen of Hoplology* (58 PAGES)

David Hall, Ph.D. - *The Yagyū Shinkage Ryū* (12 pages)

Hunter B. Armstrong - *Two Faces of Combatives* (17 pages)

MANUALS

Strength & Conditioning for the Combative Athlete by Hunter B. Armstrong (88 pages). Price: $19.50 plus $3.50 for shipping and handling.

IHS Field Notebook compiled by Hunter B. Armstrong and David Hall, Ph.D. This is the field notebook used by IHS field researchers. It provides basic information necessary for conducting hoplolgical study in the field (13 pages). **Price:** $7.50 plus $2.50 for shipping and handling.

ICS Instinctive Combat Shooting - This is the manual for the ICS course. It is intended as a course aid rather than a stand-alone manual (10 pages). Price: $7.50 plus $2.50 for shipping and handling.

Three Axioms of Hoplology:

1. The foundation of human combative behavior is rooted in our evolution. To gain a realistic understanding of human combative behavior, it is necessary to have a basic grasp of its evolutionary background.

2. The two basic forms of human combative behavior are **predatory** and **affective**. **Predatory** combative behavior is that combative/aggressive behavior rooted in our evolution as a hunting mammal. **Affective** combative behavior is that aggressive/combative behavior rooted in our evolution as a group-social animal.

3. The evolution of human combative behavior and performance is integral with the use of weapons. That is, behavior and performance is intrinsically linked to and reflects the use of weapons.

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