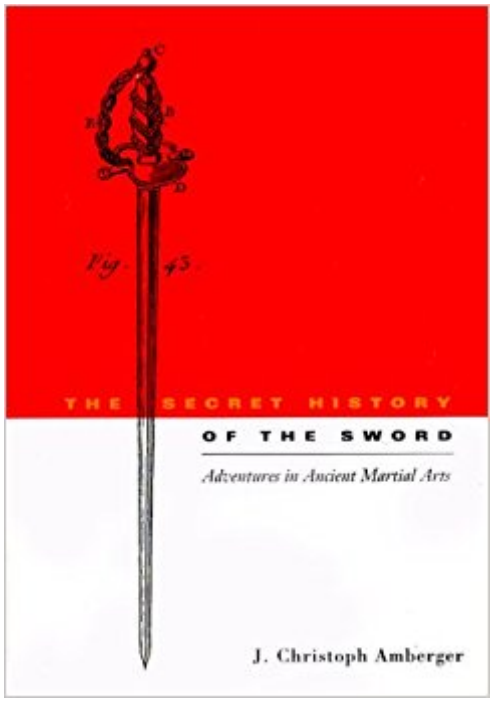
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Synopsis

The Secret History of the Sword: Adventures in Ancient Martial Arts

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Customer Reviews

The Secret History of the Sword: Adventures in Ancient Martial Arts

I admit that after reading some of the negative reviews here, I has some doubts as to how good this book would be. I still ordered it. And I’m glad I did. There’s some not-so-good aspects. It seems to have its share of typos, and it seems like at least one illustration is missing. And yes, there seems to be no ordering principle, as a previous reviewer has pointed out. But if you actually read the preface, you see why. Amberger intentionally rejects to introduce any artificial "historical" red threat to his findings, simply because he believes that a chronological or "developmental" ordering would be simplistic and does more damage to discovering the true picture than it does good. This said, each chapter stands on its own, disecting a specific aspect of a specific historical fencing system. And this is really what sets this book apart from everything else on the subject right now. Where Amberger states his opinion, he goes to great lengths documenting it. His select bibliography of works he quotes alone takes more pages than "certain" writers on historical swordsmanship spend on their entire "histories". As to the writing itself: Only a complete dunce would find it "dismissive" or "over intellectualizing". As far as fencing literature goes, Amberger is probably the most readable and entertaining writer around. His description of one of his own schlager duels is the best piece of

fencing writing I have read. It actually gave me goosebumps. This is certainly not a book for low-brow consumers of typical martial arts stuff. But if you like a side order of brain and intellect with your historical martial arts, this is the book to get.

People practicing historical martial arts come in two varieties. One group can read. The other not. The collection of reviews of Amberger's Secret History makes my case. I bought Amberger's book two years ago and I still find new things in it I didn't know. Okay, I grant you that Amberger's choice of format is not easy to follow. His style is eclectic and his writing distinctive. (On the other hand he's a native German writing in English but he does that better than most native English speakers I've known.) And I find that the lack of an index puts undue stress on someone looking for particular information on a particular subject. But only a person with blinders (or someone with a personal agenda or feelings of personal iniquity?) could call his writing bad. In fact, it is better than most other martial arts books. Only a complete dolt would not be able to see the incredible amount of information spread out. And I'm not talking anecdotes here but hundreds and hundreds of first-hand sources - French, German, English, Latin, Greek - which are quoted in the original, translated into understandable English and brought into proper context. I looked for published reviews of the book and found very positive ones, one even by Robert W Smith (known to most martial artists as John Glibey) and Diane Skoss. Believe me, you're better off taking their word regarding Amberger's book.

First, a little about what Mr. Amberger's book is not. It is not a practical guide to fencing and swordsmanship. Neither is it intended to be a complete treatise dealing with the history of the sword throughout the course of world civilization. The book is an extremely well-researched series of individual essays which largely serve to debunk many of the myths now prevalent about swords, swordsmanship, and armed combat in general. His scope is largely confined to the West.What makes the book special is Mr. Amberger himself. First, he is a thorough and careful scholar, working in a field where there are few serious scholars. Second, he has a crystal-clear writing style, good sense of humor, and a great deal of common sense. These qualities are rare indeed in modern scholarship, where what passes for erudtion is to be as unintelligible as possible, and to quote Derrida and Deleuze a lot.I am not a fencer, but I did not find that his use of some technical fencing terminology interfered with my understanding. I would wholeheartedly recommend this book to anyone interested in this subject. Very enjoyable reading and extremely informative.

This book is an amazing treasure-house of anecdotes, accountings, and historical musings on

sword play across the generations and cultures. Its loose presentation style lends it to reading in frenetic bursts. I really enjoyed his commentary and analysis of fencing training and combat arts. One criticism is that he seems not as strong on pre-Renaissance swordsmanship or history. But just skim that part at the beginning --- the rest of the book is great, especially the accounts of his duels in the German fencing halls.

A good read? Certainly. Well researched? Undeniably. Unique in perspective and presentation. No doubt about it.But what most reviewers here have been missing is that the underbelly of Amberger's book presents a quite revolutionary set of evaluative criteria that can and should be used to put all human fight scenarios (not only those with edged weapons) into proper perspective.While the accounts of duels and the scientific explosion of myths are great, insightful, and extremely well written, Amberger's single most important contribution to the Martial Arts is his Grid of Steel... a systematic set of criteria that... when applied to a given scenario... enables you to crystallize the ultimate purpose and end of the fight. Applied BEFORE a fight, it focuses you on exactly what you need to achieve... how and how fast you need to achieve it... and what you need to cut out to meet your ultimate purpose.An excellent, excellent book.

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