



**by Guru Scott McQuaid**

When we talk of martial arts, visions of Asia with its temples, dojos and flamboyant pyjama wear come to mind. However, the first documented combat art with punching, throws and locks, comes from the west in the second millennium BCE in the territory of ancient Greece.

This ancient martial art is known as Pankration and it mixes wrestling and boxing. Its name derives from the ancient Greek words pan (all) and kratos (strength, might, power) and literally means “all of the might”. A more generic translation for Pankration is simply ‘all powers’. In 648 BCE, Pankration was introduced as a sporting event in the 33rd Olympic Games and many would say that this art paved the way for today's MMA (mixed martial arts).

The common term '*martial arts*' is used for the structured practice of combat arts used in self-defense. The term martial arts derives from the Latin phrase meaning the 'Arts of Mars', from the Roman god of war. It was first seen in print in 1639 in an English fencing manual and much later the phrase became more commonly used around Europe during the 1950s. So despite the general thinking of the expression martial arts coming from Asia, it is in fact western terminology.

The phrase HEMA (Historical European Martial Arts) refers to martial arts of European origin, particularly using arts formerly practised, but having since died out or evolved into very different forms today. WMA (Western Martial Arts) is a modern derivative of HEMA. The surge in WMA has come in the last ten years, with martial artists looking beyond Asian arts and finding combative styles closer to home.

To name a few of the fighting styles that would come under the WMA banner: Boxing, Wrestling, Krav Maga, ATK, Systema, Savate, Bartitsu, Bataireacht, Fencing, Gladius, Viking

Sword, Tomahawk combat, Longsword, Rapier, Spear fighting, Longbow Archery, Quarterstaff, Haitian machete fencing, La Canne, and more recently MMA.

Most of these have their fair share of esoteric, semi-mythical ritualised far fetched wisdoms, but many hold true to the distinguishing notion of martial art from either sport or reality based fighting. By logical reasoning, the arts practiced by the armies past and present are the apex of WMA, they have been tried and tested on the battlefield. The rhetoric is not about how effective these western martial arts are, but more about bringing the attention of the ambit of the various WMA that exist. This article merely scratches the summit of the topic and focuses on particular western martial arts that I have a personal experience in training in which makes for a more conclusive feature.



The Roman sword often referred to as the sword that conquered the world is a direct representative of the Roman Empire with its reign and legacy.

The term '*Gladius*' is a Latin word for sword, that is often used to describe the Ancient Roman foot soldiers sword. The gladius was developed by the Celtic peoples in what is now Spain. This was during the early part of the conquest of Hispania. This sword was known as the gladius hispaniensis, or "Hispanic sword".

The Romans adopted this weapon from the Celts during the Second Punic War, 218-201 BCE, while fighting the invading Carthaginians. Then for the next 400 years, this was the definitive weapon of the Roman military. They reshaped their tactics around this weapon, built the largest military machine Europe had ever seen, and rose to dominate the Mediterranean.

Some scholars note that before the AK-47 machine gun was produced, the Roman gladius sword had killed more people than any other weapon. Although this is a broad assumption, it certainly signifies just how effective the weapon was in battle.

The gladius is double edged, used primarily for thrusting which is obvious by its tapered point, but it was still effective in cutting and slashing. The blade is welded together with high carbon steel strips, with a channel down the centre. The owner's name was usually engraved on the blade.

Though the primary infantry attack was thrusting at stomach height, they were trained to take any advantage, such as slashing at kneecaps beneath the shield wall.

For variations on cuts, the sword was sometimes held flat. This particular grip was used to thrust the blade into the opponent's stomach without hitting any bone obstacles. It would pierce through the rib cage gaps, penetrating through the victim's back.

The principal to why the gladius was so effective in combat is due to its size. The sword simply allows room for movement, the handler can adjust from long or short distance by merely extending or detracting their arm. Although constant readjustment is key in battle, the handler's footwork is condensed and less foot manoeuvres are required.

Once your opponent gets beyond the length of your blade, the sword handler has to make a big shift in positioning to allow them to use their sword, especially if they are using a German long sword or a Japanese katana. They have to pull out of close range distance to allow them to use the length of the sword effectively. Whereas with the gladius, if you manage to close the distance and bypass their blade, the handler only needs to pull back his elbow creating enough space to then insert the gladius into the opponent's stomach.

The gladius is approximately 85 cm in length and this is arguably the most effective blade in battle as its results are historically accounted for, with the Roman Empire overpowering territories such as England, Wales, Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Belgium, Gibraltar, Romania, Moldova, Ukraine, coastal northern Africa, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, the Balkans, Albania and so on. The argument is simply what other blade has conquered so many against such a variety of weapons on multiple landscapes.



A surge in HEMA (Historical European Martial Arts) in recent years has brought lots of medieval fighting practices into the spotlight, like the M1 Medieval project in Moscow, which sees two knights in full armour fighting with swords in an octagon for three three-minute rounds. Other competitions consist of jousting, longsword, rapier, archery and the quarterstaff.

The term "quarterstaff" surfaced in the mid-16th century. Scholars believe the name derives from the way the staff is held, that being with the right hand grasping it one-quarter of the distance from the lower end, although the etymology is not confirmed.

During the 16th century quarterstaves were a popular choice of weapon by the London Masters of Defence and by the 18th century the quarterstaff was heavily involved in gladiatorial prize playing. Quarterstaffing, as a fighting art reigned supreme in England for many centuries, it was considered the weapon of the lower sections of society.

British fairgrounds staged quarterstaff fighting held on a narrow plank of wood over a river. The idea was to thrust rather than knock your opponent into the water.

The Quarterstaff evolved out of the medieval tradition of stick-fighting. The stick's length ranges between 6 and 9 feet which makes it very difficult to close in on its handler. The Maisters (masters) of quarterstaffing often had their staffs made to their individual stature.

As with any fighting system, your initial stance is of fundamental importance in quarterstaff combat. Your dominant foot should be closer to your opponent, with your non-dominant hand at

the base of the staff. The other hand should be placed a quarter of the way up the staff. The staff was most effective in striking, jabbing and bludgeoning, with its most common attack being a downward strike that can come from various angles. Defensive manoeuvres consist of blocking with the end of the stick parrying left to right, but if the attack is low, like a leg strike then a typical block would be to thrust the end of the staff into the ground and release the foremost hand away from danger.

Throughout its history, the quarterstaff was mostly identified with sports and non-fatal combats rather than a weapon for the battlefield, but this does not take away from how effective the staff is in genuine combat.



There is perhaps no more tested hand to hand combat then that of the art of pugilism. Two guys stand in a ring and their mindset is to knock the other one unconscious. This is what they have been training to do for the past two to three months and that's their entire focus.

Apart from its derivatives like Muay Thai, Kick Boxing and MMA, boxing arguably stands as the most dominant and proven unarmed combat system.

The earliest known depiction of boxing comes from a Sumerian relief in Iraq from the 3rd millennium BC. A relief sculpture from Egyptian Thebes, 1350 BC shows boxers and spectators. These early Middle-Eastern and Egyptian depictions showed contests where fighters were either bare-fisted or had a leather band bound around their wrist. A more structured form of boxing was formalised in Ancient Greece and was later introduced into their Olympic games in

the 23rd Olympiad, 688 BC.

The earliest evidence of fist fighting with the use of gloves can be found on Minoan Crete, 1500–1400 BC. Boxing became less popular after the fall of the Western Roman Empire, when the wearing of weapons became common and glamorous. But there were some fist-fighting events maintained in different cities and provinces across Italy between the 12th and 17th centuries. Boxing would later resurface in England during the early 16th century in the form of bare-knuckle boxing, referred to as prizefighting with its first documentation in 1681. During this time there were no written rules, no weight divisions, no round limits and no referee.

In 1867, the Marquess of Queensberry rules were drafted introducing measures that remain in effect for professional boxing to this day.

The only real weapon a boxer has is his punch, so naturally a boxer's punch is considered by many to be the most effective punch in all combat forms. I would certainly agree with this notion as boxer's entire training revolves around the aim of knocking somebody out. There is no study of locks, grappling or control and restraint, there is but one purpose, to knock your opponent unconscious. Boxing is littered with fatal injuries, detached retinas, brain hemorrhage, fractured bones, permanent neurological disorders and sometimes death. A study showed that 70 elite-level boxers could punch with an average of 776 pounds of force. Another study of 23 boxers showed elite fighters were able to punch more than twice as hard as novices.

Now martial arts referring to the word in its perception of Asian arts has far more tools than just punching to learn, so their punches do not generate as much force. A study of 12 karate black belts showed so-called reverse punches delivered an average force of 325 pounds, with the strongest measuring 412 pounds.

A boxer utilises every part of their body to deliver a punch. The key to any combat is a good stance and in boxing it provides balance and is imperative to both attacking and defensive techniques. Boxers' stance allows them to not only throw out power punches, but also to withstand heavy shots. A wide stance allows you to generate power, but can also leave you off balance, so constant readjustment is essential.

The lateral movement boxers adopt while fighting is their greatest asset and something that

traditional martial arts lacks. Moving both head and shoulders side to side while striking allows them to get different angles on their punches while maintaining a safe defensive from being hit. A martial artist is generally taught to step to the side flanking their opponent in one big movement. Although this practice does work, a real fight is circumstantial, meaning that you may not have the luxury of space to manoeuvre your entire body. So a slight shoulder roll or bob and weave would help defensively while also creating room for you to strike your opponent. The blend of both martial art and boxing thinking is best seen today in MMA, whereby the fighter will alternatively change through various practices according to the situation in the fight.

It's common to compare boxers of the past against today's prize fighters, but this is extremely difficult to determine when you consider the evolution of the sport. Today's boxers receive many benefits from the advancements in both diet and the science of pugilism. Modern pugilists are accompanied by more than their coach and cut-man which back in the day was one of the same. They now have a nutritionist, overseeing the fighter's diet, a strength and conditioning coach, to ensure the fighter is recovering from their workouts. There are even some boxers that will employ the use of a sports psychologist, to aid them with the mental stress that the fight game can induce.

Training methods have changed drastically with coaches studying in plyometrics that aid in explosiveness as well as the use of cryogenic pods for better recovery.

Likewise, fight scheduling has changed, so fighters wear and tear takes less of a toll on their career because they are not fighting as often. Today's boxer fights about 2 to 3 times a year, in contrast with the old days where it was not uncommon for fighters to fight 3 times in a month. However, the law of repetition states that the more time you spend practicing, the better you will be at it. So the questions begs: who is better at their craft - the fighter who fights 8 to 10 times a year, or the fighter who fights once or twice a year.



The gentlemen's art known as *Bartitsu* is an early form of hybrid martial arts intended for self defence, founded by Englishman Edward William Barton-Wright in 1898.

He is the first known European to have combined Asian and European martial arts styles, blending training methods of the Japanese, Swiss, French and English combative styles, arguably forming a precursor to MMA.

The name '*Bartitsu*' stems from the founder's name with the Japanese suffix 'itsu' combined to make this Victorian martial art.

The defining principles of Bartitsu are to disturb the equilibrium or physical state of the balance of your opponent. Then surprise them with an attack. The style utilises Boxing, Jiu Jitsu, Judo, Savate and Cane fighting.

In the practice of Bartitsu, the student will always start with range fighting that mainly consists of boxing, savate and jiu jitsu, basically punching and kicking. Most of the mid distance techniques consist of throws, tripping, twisting the opponents head or elbow joints. The close quarter techniques such as grappling applications and ground work come from judo, but Barton-Wright seem to cut out the typical hip and shoulder throws that we commonly see in judo. The style is geared towards self defence in an urban, industrialised society, so rolling around on the cobblestones of Victorian London was not really a suggested plan of attack.

The cane work is heavily influenced by French stick fighting, particularly the Vigny style. The cane in hand could be anything from a ball top cane to a crook handle. The stick was manipulated with the wrist and not with the fingers as in sword play. There are both one handed methods as well as two handed techniques. Also the practitioner was taught to be ambidextrous with the cane.

The strikes are fast whipping motions often coming down towards as the fighting position tends to be all high guard stances.

Perhaps one of the more unique elements to his fabrication of Bartitsu is the use of everyday



items as defensive aids in combat. Such as using an overcoat to throw over your opponent to blind them momentarily to gain advantage. Using a walking stick, umbrella and even a bicycle. It is believed he adopted this way of thinking from the 'Metsubushi' techniques, which was a practice used by mercenaries in feudal Japan. Certainly methods like this were employed by the ninja clans.

The art practiced in its traditional format is known as Canonical Bartitsu, referring to the system as we know it. This means the teachings come from Barton-Wright's lecture notes, printed publications and studies recorded by former Bartitsu club members from 1903 and 1923. However, combat has significantly changed and with human existentialism, the style has greatly developed and moulded a newer modern legislation for Bartitsu referred to as Neo-Bartitsu. The meaning behind this phrase is what the system can be today. This practice furthers Barton-Wright's work by applying the system to today's urban jungle while cross training in various martial disciplines, but always maintaining the form and ideas of Bartitsu.



One of the more rare western weapons that have become very popular to practice is the '*Tomahawk*'

The single-handed axe famously used by the native North American Indians is now being utilised by various martial art systems across the world.

The name tomahawk first came into the English language during the 17th century and this min axe resembled a hatchet. They were general-purpose tools, made of wood and stone, but when needed used for hand-to-hand combat and throwing. The Natives traded the tomahawk with the European colonials for various goods. In later years, the tomahawk evolved with the axe head forged from metal and the blade shape taking the mould of the Royal Navy boarding axe.

There is no official worldwide structured training program for this weapon, but there are martial

instructors that have incorporated the axe into their preferred combat system. Some Kali practitioners from the Filipino stick fighting system have successfully interlaced the tomahawk into their art, while some Krav Maga enthusiasts from the military self-defence system of Israel have also managed to blend the tomahawk into their training.

The tomahawk has proven to be very effective in combat with its hybrid martial studies. One of its key advantages for the wielder is the close-quarter combat situations. The axe averagely measures between 18 to 24 inches long, making it able to fight from long, mid and short distance.

The length of the handle makes a significant difference in battle, as a longer handle provides more reach, allowing more distance from your attacker which results in more response time. The possibility to initiate centrifugal impact with each swing is also increased by having a handle that is longer.

The larger the mass, the larger the power, accumulated with each strike. But too much mass will make it problematic in recovering from committed swings. However the Native Americans created the ideal balance with their tomahawk design.

In retrospect, martial arts is more than just the arts of Asia, but the fighting arts of the world, for there is not a singular martial arts system that has not been influenced by another. In a reality based approach it doesn't matter which art came first or what culture created a particular combat style. What matters is how effective the individual is in using the martial system. Martial arts literally means the arts of prevailing in combat, so know your art and fight hard.

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