A transcription and English translation of
“Vechtboek” – manuscript BPL 3281

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1-2-2014
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About this document
The following document is a complete transcription and English translation of a manuscript fragment held in the collection of the Leiden University Library under Shelfmark BPL 3281. The manuscript consists of sixteen pages of roughly 190x150 mm², each containing one drawing of a dagger fighting technique, with a short descriptive text underneath each plate. It has been dated to ca. 1520-1530.

In the following transcription, uncertainties have been placed between brackets (“<…>”). These brackets have also been used in the translation, either to indicate these uncertainties in the transcription, or to indicate uncertainties in the translation. Square brackets (“[…]”) have been used to indicate additions to the transcription made for clarity. Where necessary, further comments on the transcription and translation have been added in footnotes.

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It[em] staec ieme na u van onder armen
soe legt u rechte hant over u slincke ghecrust
tret in mette rechte en volcht mette mette
clincken na en tret noch eens ein en soe
worptten tegen den gront oft stect u hant diep
doore toot over zijne ellebeghe en stect hem zijne
hooft tussen u beene en clapten op zijne <rechten>
en stecken in eene <sack>.

If someone thrusts at you below the arm, then place your right hand crosswise over your left, step in
with the right and follow after with the left, and step in once more and in this way throw him against
the ground, or thrust your hand through deep to over his elbow and thrust his head between your
legs and clap on his <right> and thrust in one <go>. 
If someone thrusts at you from below then place your hands one over the other your right hand on top so that your one thumb is not in\(^1\) and step around with the right leg and throw his arm on your shoulder and take his dagger, or strike him in the neck and twist around strongly one or two turns.

\(^{1}\) It is unclear what “niet en” means here. It could imply that the thumb is “not in”, or that it is “not one”, i.e. not alone – supported by the other hand.
If someone thrusts at you from below, then throw your dagger against his thrust and throw it far from you, or take it from him with your left hand and then you have both daggers.
It[em] den ghecruste steck van bove soe zalmen
hem vanggen en trecke hem sterck neder
het verset daer af soe nemt zijn Dagge mettu
<crune>² en trekse hem om oft grijphem met
zijne elleboghe en duwet hem om in zijne buick

The crosswise thrust from above you will catch thus and then pull him down strongly. The counter
to that, then take his dagger with your <pommel³> and pull it around or grab him by his elbow and
push it around into his belly.

² This could possibly be supposed to read “duime”, meaning “thumb”.
³ A literal translation of “crune” would be “crown”.
If someone thrusts at you from above and he grabs you by your clothing, then grab his fist. Take his dagger with your right hand and with your left at his elbow push strongly from you and twist around doubly and so you are <released from> him and have his dagger.
If someone thrusts at you from below you will take your dagger in both your hands and throw your dagger in front of him and let him thrust against it and then grab his thumb captured named the prison.

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4 This should most likely read “ghevangen”, which is translated as “captured”.
If someone thrusts at you from above, named the hook, thus you will pull it from his hand and place your thumb on top of the dagger on the pommel and hook\textsuperscript{5} it, but you must set your right foot around and hook him and fall with your left hand on his right arm and push it \textit{<all> further down.}

\textsuperscript{5} A more literal translation would be “unhook”.
If someone strikes at you or thrusts at you from above then take his hand with which he thrusts or strikes from below his dagger with your left hand and with your right hand thrust between his legs and strongly pull down his hand in which he has the dagger and so throw him on your shoulders and go with the snare. 

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6 Alternatively: “nader”, meaning “closer”.

7 The meaning of the Dutch word “striken” is unclear in this context. Here, it is interpreted as “strikken”; “snares”.
If someone thrusts at you from above, you will step from him with your right foot and grab at his right arm with your left hand your four fingers above and your thumb below, your elbow in his side and then grab him under his right leg below his knee and lift his leg up and so he must fall by force.
If someone thrusts at you from below, then throw him your dagger against his thrust and strike it out of his hand. Let your one hand go over his and take it from him in two manners.
It were that someone thrusts at you from above, named the hook then place your thumb above on the pommel of your dagger and turn around backwards and hook it. Twist one or two turns around and throw his dagger out of his hand.

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8 See footnote 5.
If someone thrusts at you from above and he grabbed you by the clothes, then place your hand on his and strike up from below and grab his hand in which he has his dagger, and pull this strongly to you and with the other hand at his elbow and twist around strongly. If he thrusts from below then place your hand on your belly and take it out of his hand just as the crosswise thrust.
It[em] den ghecrusten steck van boven soe zalmen hem vanggen en trecken hem sterck nederre het verset daer af soe nemt zijn Daghe metten <hechte> en dous hem contrari om in zijnen buick <ocht> dout hem zijne elleboghe contrari om en alsoe nemt hem zijn Dagge

The crosswise thrust from above you will catch thus and pull him down strongly. The counter to that then take his dagger by the <binding> and push it contrary around in his belly. Also push his elbow contrary around and take his dagger from him so.

\[9\] This could be either “by” or “with” depending on the meaning of the word “hechte”. See footnote 10.

\[10\] This word is hard to make out in the manuscript. “hechte” could alternatively mean “close”. Possible alternatives for “hechte” are “rechte”, meaning “right” (i.e. with the right hand, though this would be unlikely as the right hand is trapped), or “hocht(e)”, meaning “high” or “height”. Finally, the hilt could be what is intended.
If it were so that someone grabbed you by your hair and thrust at you, then you will first displace his thrust and grab his dagger with which he thrusts and beat his hand which he has in your hair from above downwards.
It[em] waert dat elck een Dagghe inder hant hadde en grept mekanderen int haer soe wie dat ierst stake die hadde zijn Dagghe verloeren en alsoe hebdi beide Daggen

If it were that each had a dagger in hand and grabbed each other by the hair, then he who thrusts first has lost his dagger and then you have both daggers.
It[em] waert dat elck een Daghe inder hant hadde en grepen makanderen int haer soe wie dat jerst stake die hadde sijn Dagghe verloeren. It[em] waert dat bij also datse beide die naelde staken soe moetmen gade slaen en versetten hem zijne steck en metter zelver hant soe moet manse uiter hant neme.

If it were that each had a dagger in hand and grabbed each other by the hair, then he who thrusts first has lost his dagger. If with that it were so that they both thrust the needle, then you must observe and displace his thrust and so with the same hand you must take it out of his hand.