

Cloak Work

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Cloak is one the prettiest weapon forms we use. Good cloak work is impressive to watch and can be very effective. In this article, I will discuss my experiences with the cloak along with suggestions for what makes for an effective cloak.

Why Use a Cloak:

Cloaks were used for the simple fact that they were available. It would have been as unlikely for a gentleman to be without his cloak as it would be for him to be without his hat or sword. So, while the cloak may not be the ideal secondary weapon, it is better than nothing. Also, as we are gentlemen showing our skill before the crown, this form allows us to show a mastery of all the types of defense.

How to Grip the cloak:

With a full or $\frac{3}{4}$ circle cloak, grasp the cloak by the center of the collar with the first finger extended to guide the cloak.

Use of Cloak:

I feel that the cloak forces me into a more active attack style. This is due to the feeling that the cloak makes for a weak defense, so a strong offense must cover this.

- Attack
 1. Precede your attack with a snap of the cloak to deflect your opponent's blade and open him up for your thrust.
 2. Distract your opponent with different movements of the cloak, the eye will naturally seek to follow a moving object.
Note: be careful that you do not set up a pattern; your opponent may attack when the cloak can't defend you.
 3. Use to cloak to hide your sword movements; this is used most often with full size cloaks.
- Defense
 1. The best way to defend with the cloak is by a rapid up or down snap of the cloak toward the centerline of the body. Immediately after this, step back and snap in the opposite direction. This will have the effect of blocking the blade even if you have missed it with the first sweep.
 2. Another defense is to sweep the cloak up and around or forward and out to entangle you opponent's blade.

3. DeGrassi and several other masters recommend wrappings the cloak around your hand to defend against a cut. Unfortunately, with current Middle Kingdom rules, we cannot use the cloak in such a manner to defend the hand from the cut.

Cloak characteristics:

Size:

I prefer a full or $\frac{3}{4}$ circle cloak of 5 feet in diameter. This allows the cloak to flow well and makes it large enough to provide protection. A full cloak can also be used.

Note: using a full cloak can be difficult due to its weight. With a full cloak, I wear it and grasp it by the hem to deflect the blade. The full cloak can also be used to hide an attack.

Color:

I prefer using contrasting colors in a cloak. The dance of contrasting colors will catch the opponent's eye better.

Weight:

The cloaks weight is the most important variable. If the cloak is too light, it will not be able to deflect the blade. If too heavy, it will be difficult to use for extended periods of time.

Note: there must be no metal weights in the cloak. To weigh the cloak, use cloth or rope.

Material:

The most important decision in cloak construction is the material used.

Resistant material is best, not because of a rule but because of durability.

Note: be careful that material is not too stiff. Stiff material will adversely effect the flow of the cloak.

Good Materials:

1. Trigger, 2-3 layers
2. Pinwheel corduroy
3. Ultrasuede-expensive, but catches a blade well
4. Supple Leather-same as ultrasuede

Bad Materials:

1. Broadcloth-to light without weighting
2. Upholstery-to heavy

Final Words:

A cloak is not the only soft parry device. I use a monkey puppet for a soft parry as well. This object works mainly by distraction of the opponent. The opponent is so busy with the monkey, he forgets he is in a sword fight. I have also used tabards and foam fish as soft parries. The soft parry allows you to add some fun into the fight as well as beauty and grace.