

L'Arte maestra (The Master Art)

by Giuseppe Colombani

Translated and transcribed by Piermarco Terminiello

Introduction

Giuseppe Colombani was a Baroque-era fencing master, adventurer and errant polymath, who in later life settled to write several books and become the most celebrated dentist in Venice. While much of what we know of Colombani comes from his own writings (and as such should be taken with a pinch of salt), his colourful early years nonetheless make for entertaining reading, as demonstrated by the following biographical account (from Lasagni, Roberto, *Dizionario biografico dei Parmigiani*. PPS Editrice, Parma, 1999):

COLOMBANI CARLO GIUSEPPE

Parma 21 January 1676 - Venice 1735 or 1736

Born to Francesco, a veteran soldier, and Isabella, in the parish of San Bartolomeo. His godparents were the Most Illustrious Gian Carlo Buralli and Lady Maria Lalatta. Given the social rank of his godparents it is probable that the family was of a certain social status. In the years 1693-1694 Colombani fought in Piedmont against the French armies of Catinat. In fact between 1688 and 1694 there was a war between the French and Vittorio Amedeo of Savoy, supported by the Austrian Empire.

The war consisted of battles, brief sieges, and continual skirmishes and ambushes. The adventurous and entrepreneurial spirit, and the sacking and looting of the occupying troops, led to the recruitment of many youths. Colombani, barely 17 years old, overcoming his father's opposition, therefore signed-up with many companions to the troops of Vittorio Amedeo of Savoy. He participated in several battles (Guastella, Pinerolo, Orbassano, Santa Brigida, Staffarda) and conducted himself with valour, thereby obtaining the rank of officer and flag-bearer. From thereon he bore the title of "Alfieri Lombardo", a

distinction he used frequently, flaunting his heroic escapades. In fact he learned the use of arms and became extremely able in the use of the sword, so much so as to become a fencing master and teach it to many young nobles. Colombani confesses to have obtained lavish payments from it. In any case, before the war ended in 1694 he deserted together with a companion and embarked from Genoa to Barcelona. During the voyage he had the opportunity to perfect his skill at cards, winning a handsome sum at the gaming tables (a hundred doubloons) thanks to his brilliant prestidigitation.

In Barcelona he made use of his lively and eclectic intelligence to learn Spanish dancing, to play various musical instruments and to perfect his fencing play, also performing exhibitions at various academies. Returning to Italy he began to present himself in the piazzas with the most varied and spectacular displays. Wandering, he arrived at Malta then Sicily. In Palermo he met a Persian mountebank who offered him his daughter's hand in marriage in exchange for fencing lessons for them both. All three of them dedicated themselves to pushing the most varied medications, medical secrets, a miraculous eyewash for sore eyes and several other concoctions, while accompanied by exhibitions and music. Following this, with the help of another charlatan called "Testa di Ferro", he freed himself from the Persian conman and his daughter and moved to Naples where he learned the art of puppetry, acted on stage and began to perform as a tightrope walker. As a fencer he started to attract the interest of Naples's viceroy from whom he obtained honours and ample payment.

Having embarked on a pirate ship in 1700 he arrived in Rome where he made a solemn promise to abandon all of his trickery and burn his books on devilries. Shortly afterwards however he set up a stall in Piazza Navona with four tightrope walkers, and through various schemes scraped together a large sum of coin. Joining with a Spanish prostitute he travelled to several countries (France, Holland, and England) squandering all of his worldly wealth. Finally he set off for Livorno where he met a respected tooth-puller and married his daughter, Apollonia. From this point Colombani maintained a more serious professional life putting his intelligence and fundamental honesty to better use. He arrived in Venice in 1709 where he set up a stall in Piazza San Marco at the third column "del Broglio". In Venice some general rules were in place for the practice of minor medicine: Colombani had to undertake some fairly rigorous exams and was one of the few to obtain the official diploma in dentistry.

Between 1710 and 1712 he competed in the public piazza with various charlatans and demonstrated himself more capable than the other tooth-pullers. He became honoured by the people, proclaiming to demand nothing from the poor; extracting teeth, cleaning, implanting and applying poultices to them, healing blockages, curing ulcers, lancing abscesses, attending to breakages of every sort. He affirmed "in Venice I will be admired attentively, loved without distinction by the crowd, and finally hated without discretion, although by the tricksters and lying charlatans". But he also proclaimed to know how to use every sort of weapon, to amuse himself with poetry, to be a good practitioner of medicine and a dentist second to none, equalled only by his wife Apollonia Colombani, who in 1719 in Venice published a work where she showed women to be equal to men in such practices and declared to have extracted more than five thousand teeth.

In the twenty five years he lived in Venice, Colombani made a fortune, earning from five to ten "zecchini" for every treatment he administered. Together with the practice of his profession Colombani published various medical works whose peculiarity raises not little interest. Colombani's fundamental works can be found in the Palatina Library in Parma, in the block of volumes acquired from the Paciaudi family at the time of the library's founding: Il tutto ristretto in poco, ossia il tesoro aperto dove ognun può arricchirsi in virtù, salute, ricchezza: "All condensed in a little, or rather the open treasure whereby everyone may enrich themselves in virtue, health and wealth" (Venice, 1724, published by Domenico Milocco), with various plates. In 1725 he wrote Opera nuova, apri ben l'occhio: "New work, keep your eyes well open" (Venice, Baggio Maldura), rich with autobiographical references. Colombani began another book entitled Vita, viaggi, incontri dell'Alfieri Lombardo: "Life, travels and encounters of the Alfieri Lombardo" but it seems that it was neither finished nor published. Instead another of his books was published entitled Il castigamatti ossia il Flagello della Bugia: "The stickler, or rather the Scourge of Lies (Venice, published by Milocco, 1732). From the many books he read (in his writings there are frequent citations of illustrious authors such as Terence, Tacitus, Aristotle, Plato, Arnaldus de Villa Nova, Bacon, Vesalius and Paracelsus) and from his long experience, he obtained and described exact notions of the structure of the human body and of therapeutic principles useful to him in curing others.

This present work is brief at little over four thousand words, as such it can be barely more than an overview of Colombani's views on fencing. Nevertheless he

does attempt some technical descriptions of actions with the single sword, as well as touching upon interesting and unusual topics, such as combat between a sword and a sabre, fighting with a halberd against a multitude of swords, and combat at night. Of particular note is the fact Colombani's treatise reproduces exact copies of plates from Marozzo's *Opera nova* of 1536 (specifically from chapters 85, 113 & 141, 36 and 64 respectively).

Colombani's work is also remarkable for its late inclusion of the two-handed Spadone, second only to Giuseppe D'Alessandro's posthumous *Opera* of 1723 among known Italian treatises (a similarly brief treatment, consisting principally of a single plate). Perhaps this can be explained by Colombani's early career as a flag-bearer, the two-handed sword at one time being the traditional weapon of the colour guard, as noted by Di Grassi (1570).

Whatever the case Colombani's work provides another window into the context, mindset and techniques of period swordplay; and as such, notwithstanding its brevity, it rewards our consideration.



Giandomenico Tiepolo – *Il Cavadenti* ("the Tooth-Puller") 1754/5

Note to the Transcription

Colombani's *L'Arte maestra*, consists of a title page, followed by seven pages of densely packed text, together with four plates directly reproduced from the 1536 edition of Marozzo (two preceding the text and two following it), which appear to bear no direct relation to the present work.

The quality of the printing can be described as mediocre at best, with a relatively high number of obvious misprints; including reversed, inverted and rotated characters in addition to the simple misprints and misspellings.

While the original font is clear and fairly “modern” to our eyes, with time the text has faded in several places, with some characters hard to decipher and other almost obliterated. This, together with the cramped text blocks, and the archaic orthographical conventions typical of the period, renders the treatise more arduous to approach than might otherwise be the case.

The language itself (in addition to the expected archaisms) bears a number of traits typical of northern Italian dialects, and in particular that of Venice (where the treatise was printed and Colombani resided at the time) rather than the Emilian of Colombani's birth. This is evident, for example: in the frequent elision both of vowels (e.g. *boni* instead of *buoni*) and double consonants (e.g. *bote* instead of *botte*), in the lexicon (e.g. *brazzo* instead of *braccio*, *scartosso* instead of *cartoccio*), and in a couple of instances even in the definite article (e.g. *el ferarolo* instead of *il ferraiuolo*).

The intention in producing this transcription was to remain faithful to the original, while making some concessions to legibility. Specifically some orthographical features typical to written and printed works in Colombani's day have been modernised for greater clarity. The decisions made in transcribing the treatise, highlighting what has been revised or left unaltered, are summarised below:

- To give something of the original's character, the paragraphing, spacing (even where inconsistent), relative font size (in particular on the title page) and tightly packed nature of the body text reflect the printed work.

- While the body text of the transcription does not match the original line for line, the pagination is unaltered.
- Where there is intentional spacing between letters in a word, for example on the title page, this has been preserved.
- The italicisation follows the original, even where this is erratic or falls in the middle of a word (e.g. *combattere*).
- The accents follow the original, even where they appear anomalous or contradict modern usage.
- The exception to the above is where a horizontal or acute accent marks the elision of the subsequent letter “n”. This has been amended (e.g. *mōdo* has been transcribed as *mondo*).
- The original typically leaves a space before full stops and commas. This has been amended to reflect the modern convention.
- In a few instances characters have been reversed, inverted or rotated. These instances have been corrected except in two cases where the letter “n” has been reversed to appear as a “u” and vice-versa; these have been presented as per the original but cited in the endnotes.
- The eszett (ß) has been transcribed as “ss”.
- As typical for the period, the letters “u” and “v” are both presented as “u” in the body of a word. This has been amended to reflect the modern convention.
- As typical for printed works in the period, the form of the lowercase letters “s” and “f” is identical. This has been amended to reflect the analogous modern spelling as appropriate.
- Again, typically for the period, a doubled letter “i” is presented as “ij”. This has been updated to the modern “ii”.

**Transcription of
L'Arte maestra
di Giuseppe Colombani:**





L'ARTE MAESTRA

DI
GIUSEPPE COLOMBANI
DETTO
L'ALFIER LOMBARDO

Nella qual s'impara facilmente ad'ogni persona ad'imparrare a maneggiar da se stesso la Spada , e Pugnale Tabaro , Targa , Labarda , Bandiera , Spadone à due mani, con le regole, che deve usar ogni persona trovandosi con la Spada nuda per ben guardarsi , e diffendersi.

Opera utile ad'ogni persona

DEDICATA
AL MERITO IMPAREGGIABILE
DELLA GIOVENTU' VENEZIANA.

IN VENEZIA , M. DCCXI.
Presso il Miloco.
CON LICENZA DE' SUPERIORI

AL LETTORE.

Conosco hò benigno Lettore esser tropo ardito in volerti presentar avani delli tuoi ochi questa mia debil fatica, mà se è vero non esser desdicenti à li animi grandi una picol offerta, dunque gradisci questa mia piccola fatica ch'io spero mediante il tuo animo ti degnarai considerarla, legerla, e troverai esser opera necessaria à tutti quelli che pretendono difender è banguardar la sua vita dandosi il vero camino per aquistar le vere bote, e la vera cognitione della Spada, solo ti posso dir di haver fatigato tutta la mia gioventù, e havendo praticato boni, e virtuosi Maestri, non pretendo però di parlar se non sotto le discipline de virtuosissimi huomini; e così voglio far conoscere à tutti quelli che bramano di saper tutte le regole della Spada, cioè non tutte, ma le più bisognose è le principali, che ogn'uno deve saper per guardarsi, così di Spada sola, come di Spada, e Pugnale, Spada, e Targa, Spada, e Tabaro, e nelle costioni di notte come si deve contenersi nelle zuffe, come ti devi regolare, come devi far per vincere senza dubio uno, che à gran core, e non possiede la vera scienza della Spada, come devi contenerli quando sarai assaltato da uno che havesse il Spontone ò Labarda, esso con la Spada difenderti, e vincerlo. Come devi con la Labarda contro la Spada, come devi manegiar il Spadone à due mani ò Spada longa in mezo à più Spade. Il modo è la vera regola per far le aste da giocar le Bandiere, e la Pica, e la vera cognitione qual sia la meglio positura di tutte avendole io praticato tutte, e come ti devi regolar con il giocar con altre nationi come devi far quando succedesse di far costione contro la Sabola, come devi regolarli contro la presa ò disarmatura. Opera in vero che ti potrà portar gran profito avendo però li boni principi da virtuosi Maestri con le figure delle guardie ò piante più bisognose. E vivi felice.

Modo facile per aprendere à ben tirare. & fare propriamente dell'armi, mediante ch'el Scolaro si voglia aplicarsi, & pigliarci pena; non è però il suo animo ne mancho sua destrezza, che lo farà riuscire bravo, ma solamente un poco di giuditio perche l'animo, e la prestezza serve poco senza l'arte.

Perche se qualche volta tira qualche colpo non è che di fortuna, mà per dare un modo facile al Scolaro à ben tirare dell'armi, bisogna prima bene situarlo sopra le sue gambe, & farlo camminare à passi piccoli, & grandi, che si fanno in avanti, & indietro, bisogna poi farli conoscere il forte, & il debole della Spada, & poi imparargli, che cosa significa quarta, terza, & seconda, & quando potrà conoscere il movimento delle stocade, bisogna situarlo nella guardia naturale facendoli conoscere, che bisogna avere una distanza trà il piede sinistro, & il piede dritto di due piedi il ginocchio sinistro, uno poco piegato, & la gamba dritta tutta distesa, le anche quadre, & il corpo dritto, & la mano sinistra in modo di cerchio à l'altezza dell'occhio: in quella positura li fatte slongare la botta di quarta, facendola partire nell'istesso tempo la mano; Dipoi fatteli piegare il ginocchio destro, & il sinistro disteso, se à caso la mano havesse bisogno del piede per andare al corpo del suo inimico; gli farete portare il piede destro in

in avanti mezo piede, & quando lo Scolaro è in quella situazione gli farete conoscere, che quella stochata si tira voltando le ongie della mano destra in alto, & quelle della sinistra à basso, li due brazzi distesi sopra d'una stessa regola egualmente alta, & egualmente sopra la regola del piede; la testa un pocho pendente al di fuori della Spada, & quando voi li havreste fatto osservare queste regole gli farete slongare la Terza partendo sempre dalla mano, & non correre, mà il piede che come hò già detto quando la mano ne havrà di bisogno, facendo osservare che le ongie della mano destra siano volte verso la terra, & quelle della sinistra verso il Cielo, il capo situato al longho della ligna del braccio direttamente al di sopra del ginocchio, perche se non è al di sopra del ginocchio, lui strascinerà infallibilmente il corpo per terra, cosa, che hò veduto molte volte nelle Salle; seguitando poi gli mostrarete à tirare la Seconda, che è propriamente una quarta rinversata che si tira al di sotto della ligna del braccio. Queste sono le tre botte principali che il Scolaro deve bene imparare; ve ne sono che si chiamano quinte, & prima del che non è troppo necessario per farle osservare allo Scolaro che nel seguito del suo travaglio che poi ne parlerò nel tempo che saranno proprie; quando una volta che lo Scolaro stà fermo, è che conosce il movimento di quelle tre botte, & che le sà portare benissimo gli farete conoscere le parade, & li colpi che bisognano per tutte le parade, primieramente voi li farete osservare in qual modo si fà la parada del forte della Spada, di dentro l'arma che si fà in levando la mano, il colpo per quella parada è una mezza botta che si fà in due tempi, altrimenti quarta rotta che li farete osservare l'espaccio di otto giorno, & quando conoscerete che sarà habite nella fonctione voi gli parete questa mezza botta per la parada della punta della Spada. la qual cosa farete conoscere al Scolaro, e i colpi che bisognano per questa parada, e una finta da dentro l'armi, & tirate al di sotto altrimenti è una finta di quarta, & tirare di terza; ecco le sue parade che si fanno nella spada e i colpi che seguano queste sorte di parade, che vi farete osservare, & tirare il spazio d'un Mese al vostro Scolaro, e quando sopra il tutto per pratticha voi gli farete conoscere quelli di sopra la spada, primieramente quelle in levando il braccio, & quella parada gli farete osservare, cha per quella parada bisogna fare una finta alla testa, & tirare detta seconda, & quando conosce benissimo il tutto gli farete conoscere la parada della punta al di fuori dell'armi per quelle parade. Voi li farete fare una finta al di fuori dell'armi, & tirare al di dentro dell'armi, altrimenti una finta di terza, & tirar di quarta, queste sono le principal parade, & colpi che si devono principalmente imparare à uno Scolaro per renderlo perfetto avanti di darli altre lettioni, che bisogna parare dal calcagno, ò veramente del forte della spada, & tenere sempre l'occhio aperto quando conoscerete che voi farete assalto, accioche lo possiate correggere quando fà male, e medesimamente metterlo in positura avanti il suo inimico, & li farete osservare come bisogna tirare il colpo quando hà tirato farglielo fare avanti voi medesimo.

Quando poi lo Scolaro havrà auto lettione tre ò quattro Mesi, voi gli farete conoscere il modo più facile per tirare qnelli¹ colpi con più destrezza,

& mostrarli come bisogna fare per battere quelli, che fugano, che corrano, & che vanno alla parada con la mano, ma avanti che di venir al giuoco per bettere con più facilità quelle sorte di persone, bisogna mostrare allo Scolaro il modo, & maniera di far assalto con giudicio dicendoli, che non bisogna mai tirare un colpo senza prima pensare bene, cioè che quando tira quarta, ò terza, e che in caso suo colpo, e parato non deve pensare à altro, che da dargli la risposta, & osservare bene come il suo colpo d'attacco è stato deffeso, s'è slato² diffeso dal forte della spada, bisogna, che dopo la sua ritirata faccia la sua meza botta, & se in caso gli è parata, che pensi sempre à darli la risposta, mà se il nemico non volesse sopportare di entrare nella sua misura, & che questo li dasse impedimento nelli suoi disegni, bisogna fargli osservare, che quando entra in misura, che il suo inimico venisse à partire, che faccia in sorte di parare li colpi, & di darli vigorosamente la risposta, & quando una volta l'inimico vede, che il colpo gl'è stato parato, non possa più tirare così arditamente, e si lascia facilmente in misura, e così e facile di poner in essecutione i suoi disegni dentro le armi, così bene come fuori le armi osservando bene le parade, & li colpi, che seguano come hò già noto qui sopra lo scolaro, che bene osserverà questi avvertimenti non mancherà di farsi habile per combattere contra qual si voglia sorte di persona, & si vuol fare scherno di qual si voglia postura, & quando mi vengono dire, che le guardie Francese la guardia todesca, & la guardia Spagnola sono più difficile à battere, che le altre queste sono tutte pazzie, il Francese, Tedesco, & Spagnolo hanno un corpo simile al mio, & se sò diffendere il mio corpo d'una buona postura, non aprovo che non sii necessario, che io prenda le loro posture per diffendermi delle loro guardie straordinarie, che io hò veduto à molti, e molti, là dove io hò fatto osservatione, che hanno manco forza dentro le loro posture, che dentro qnelle,³ che io vengo di narrare, lo scolaro conoscerà al longo andare del suo travaglio che quello ch'io vengo dire, è vero verissimo, ma avanti che di venire alli colpi che io parlando però con la lingua sono le piante di Signori Maestri di questa Ser Dom.⁴ & altre parti, mi son servito in quelle sorte di guardie, io ne diro il modo conforme me ne suggerirà il mlo⁵ poco intelletto, come bisogna battere quelle sorte di persone che fuggano, che corrano, & che parano con la mano à quelli che fuggano bisogna lasciar correre il longo della Spada per un picol passo tenendo disteso il ginocchio sinistro a fine di potersi trovare in misura per darli una bota, & in tal caso ve ne caverete, & per portare una botta, non lasciarete di finire il vostro colpo, & se tirano bisogna parare, & dare la risposta, & se lasciano cadere la punta à basso; & che vogliano levare il pugno, a voi tirate di quarta sotto la ligna del braccio opponendo la mano sinistra, quando il colpo, che si chiama quinta ò fianconata, e se sostengono la punta alta, quando voi ci lasciate di quarta, voi voltate la mano di seconda in levando bene il pugno questo è il colpo, che si chiama primo, se restano contro la vostra spada, voi cavate è farete il vostro colpo, & se parano, voi farete poi la finta conforme che le parade, che faranno, sia dentro la Spada, ò fuori della spada, ò di seconda le finte doppie sono bonissime per quelle sorte di persone mediante che

che siano ben fatte, ecco il modo, & maniera che bisogna fare per eccitare tutte le sorprese; si comincia à tirare un colpo à piedi fermo, sia quarta ò terza & se l'inimico lo para, voi farete finta di darli la risposta, e bisogna guardar in qual modo il vostro colpo è stato diffeso, e conforme la parade che l'inimico haverà fatta, gli farete la finta, e se la vostra finta è stata ancor diffesa, voi pensarete sempre alla risposta, osserverete in qual maniera la vostra finta è stata difesa, è conforme la parada, voi doppiarete la vostra finta, in rapresentando la punta là dove l'inimico ha fatto difesa, e se fa in questo modo battendo due volte del piede il primo battimento del piede si fa fermo in rapresentando la punta là dove la prima finta è stata diffesa, è il secondo battimento del plede⁶ si fa in avanzando un picol passo in avanti distendendo il ginocchio sinistro marchiando con la punta là dove l'ultimo colpo è stato diffeso, e in questo modo voi non faterete mai vostro colpo mediante che voi non andiate con troppa furia, è bisogna havere il braccio bene disteso, perche è molto pericoloso di esserne colto sopra l'istesso tempo se si fa balordamente, e per questo bisogna sempre fare come un modo di arestamento, nel doppiamento accioche possiate sempre essere lesto per parare ogni caso che l'inimico ci voglia prendere sopra quel tempo à riguardo di quelli che corrono in avanti, questa e un'altra maniera perche in cambio di avanzarsi bisogna fare in modo d'un piccolo passo indietro, e quando vedete che vogliano cortere⁷ tirate arditamente nel luogo dove vedrete più scoperto, & in quel modo non mancherete mai vostro colpo se voi pigliate bene le vostre misure, della Spada son bonissimi per questi corridori, che se fano batendo due, ò tre volte del piede, la prima volta del piede fermo, & la seconda volta partendo il piede destro in avanti di un bon mezo piede senza muovere il sinistro, & il braccio longo disteso, & rimettendovi non mancheranno di marchiare, & ii⁸ prenderete nel tempo che levano il piede nel luogo che vedrete più scoperto, sia quarta, terza o seconda, mà se a caso vengono per cerchare la spada di quarta voi tirate di terza, & se la trovate⁹ di terza voi tirate di quarta, & se vengono di seconda voi tirate di seconda quella cavatione per quelli che parano con la mano, non possono fare due, atti alla volta cioè parare, & dare, & così quando conoscerete, che un'homo para con la mano, se la tiene alta, & che voglia parare il colpo che voi gli volete portare nel estomaco, bisogna che avanzate la mano presentandogli un colpo nel istesso tompo, & quando vedete la mano avvicinarsi, voi cavate di sopra per il movimento del cercolo, & se reviene credendo di ritrovarla, voi raincavate pe'l di sotto per l'istesso movimento, & se ha la mano verso il ventricolo, & che voglia ancora servirsene per parare, voi gli presentarete il colpo giusto al cuore, & non mancherà di volere levare la mano per parare, & in quel voi tirate la punta per il movimento del cercolo nella bocca dello stomaco i e se riporta ancora la mano per ritrovarla à basso, voi rincavate di sopra, è questo è il modo, e maniera che mi son servito, & che me ne sono sempre trovato benissimo, per battere tal sorte di persone, mà vi si vole gran pazienza, & molta fatica perche non bisogna credere, che frà un'anno ò due si possi esser si forte, che il Maestro, & che si possa far dell'armi nella perfettione, per me dico, che è molto difficile di tro-

trovare un huomo molto perfetto nell'arme per ritornare alle guardie Italiane, Todesche, & Spagnole, & alli colpi, che mi sono servito per tale sorte di guardie, al Francese io li faceva una disordinatione di Spada, & al Todesco il crollamento opponendogli la mano sinistra, & qualche volta per due battimenti, uno di quarta, & l'altro crosando la Spada in avanzando un picol passo, fa ceno¹⁰ dopie finte perche si attacha molto alla Spada, per l'Espagnolo perche seconda sempre il piede di dietro, gli faceva le cavationi della Spada per un tocco qualche volta il colpo in due tempi in serando la misura per un piccolo passo, bisogna star avertito alla testa quando fate con l'Espagnuolo perche non hanno nissuna parada, perche non tirano, che à l'ochio, perche dicano, che sono più habili quando dano nell'ochii, che quando danno nel mezo dello stomaco, bisogna ancora tenere à mente, che bisogna guardare le risposte, come gli colpi d'ottaco; come sarebbe à dire osservare, come l'inemico para vostra risposta, se à caso la para in levando il braccio voi li darete la mezza botta, se la parà della punta, voi cavate, & se para la cavatione voi li farete la finta come vi hò dinotato qui sopra nelli colpi d'attaco, mà per fare riuscire ogni cosa bene, & come anche le risposte, & fare contra ogni sorte di posture, e de movimenti si vuole un grande travaglio, perche non vi è huomo, che possa mettere pratica quello, che conosce per pratica, non havendo la facilità del corso per potere esercitare gli movimenti del pensiero, & se si trovasse de corpi tanto sublimi, come gli pensieri, vi sarebbe molte persone perfette, mà la nostra natura è una machina troppo pesante, che ci vole molta fatica à regolarla, & moverla per farla riuscire con tutte le perfettioui,¹¹ nulla di meno con il giuditio; la pazienza, & il travaglio, si puole sempre arrivare à riuscire meglio, che molti altri quando ci haverete l'attentione.

Modo per diffendersi Contro una Sabola con Spada.

Primieramente se è huomo, che habbia giuditio alla Spada bisogna, che tengā la mano dove hà il maneggio contra l'e scarsella, à un piede, e mezzo da terra accioche la Sabola non possa battere la sua lama, perche la Sabola non cerca altro, che la lama per dismantarla, ò veramente il pugno, in modo tale. che quello, che si serve della Spada, deve giudicare subito, che vede quello che gioca della Sabla, & che conosce, che li vol dare un colpo, sia alla testa ò in altro luogo facendole finte al luogo dove conosce, che più facilmente puol intrare, & subito saltare indietro perche se quello, che tiene la Spada, non è troppo habile corre molto pericolo, che la furia della Sabla non gli porta danno, per quelli, che tengono la guardla¹² in diritta linea saranno sempre offesi per la Sabla, se quello, che la manteggia hà un poco di studio.

Per diffendersi contro unà Spada longa un huomo, che habbia una Spada corta d'un mezo piede poco meno, che suo inimico bisogna, che quello, che l'hà corta non si spaventi delle finte, che gli fà il suo avversario, tanto à meze botte che à desfida, che subito, che il suo inimico fornisse un colpo deve ricorrere subito parada, & serrarlo, ò stringerlo, & osservar le cavatione nel mentre che voi lo serrate, & se quello che si serve della Spada corta dà al suo inimico deve subito saltare indietro, in levando la sua Spada da se perche quello, che hà ricevuto il colpo potrebbe ancor facilmente offenderlo, & se quello, che si serve

ve della corta volesse per il suo gran animo portare delle botte in longhezza, corre pericolo perche il suo inimico si tiene forte per il grande vantaggio che hà della sua spada perche vedendosi opresso dai colpi che puol essere non potersi riparargli la forza l'obbligarebbe à stenderli il braccio per fare un colpo forado.

A servirsi della Presa

Il giuditio non deve manchare à quello che vuole saltare alla persona & non servirsene che quando il suo inimico portandogli un colpo si slonga oltre misura & vedendoli cosi tardi al ritirarsi puol proffittare del tempo è servirsi della presa.

Per difendersi contro la Labarda con Spada.

Deve avertire il giocator di spada, che deve tenere la spada forte in mano e pigliar la Spada con la mano sinistra nel mezo della lama, se l'inemico tira di dentro para con la destra e in quarta la vita se tira per difouri para e passa il sinistro piede al destro e vada alla presa senza dubio alcuno li ariuscirà.

Spada e capa, Spada e brochiere.

Quando il Scolaro averà bona cognitione di Spada sola avendo auto lettione da bon Maestro facilissimamente potrà imparar con brevità Spada e pugnale, spada e capa, spada e targa avertendo che tutte tre sono un sol gioco basta solo che si assicuri tutto il corpo sopra il piede sinistro, e la spada la porti con la mano destra alla cossia più bassa che polle usarsi & alla sinistra il pugnale che guardi con la punta alla golla del nemico cercando di scomponere il nemico e lasciarsi di botta dritta ò per fora ò di dentro che sarà più facile facendosi tirare almeno prima 15. giorni da un bon giocatore per imparare à parare con la mano sinistra il pugnale, e cosi farai di Tabaro, di Targa, e di Capello.

Modo di manegiar la Labarda contro la Spada ò in mezo una quantità di Spade.

Quando ti succedesse di cavar fori di tua bottega ò casa la Labarda contro la Spada deve pigliar con la mano destra in fondo della Labarda con la sinistra in mezo il piede destro dietro, & il sinistro avanti ritirarsi ben adietro con il braccio destro, e quando tiri la stocata tornerai subito à dietro con il tuo colpo, e mai non darai bastonate con la Labarda quando sai che il giocator di spada la sà maneggiare che ti verà facilmente alla presa.

Volendo spartire con la Labarda una costione si piglia la Labarda un palmo vicino. l fero¹³ poi con li montanti essendenti girandoti à torno con velocità tù potrai entrar nel mezo senza tuo pericolo non essendo la Labarda un palmo più alta di quello che la manegia.

Regola di Spadone à due mano contro à più Spade.

Tanto vol dire Spadone a due mani quanto ancora con una Spada longa, e trovandoti assaltato da nemici, e che fossero assia in questa occasione non vol altro che li colpi da disperato cioè entrar liberamente nel mezo, e non tirar mai di punta se non à chi ti pare che sia più debole mà con roversi tali cortelate tenendoti sempre in giro, che questo sarà il vero modo di difenderti.

Per difendersi da un gran core, mà che possieda la scherma poco.

Per tutto il mondo, che hò praticato intesi à dir moltissimi casi cioè, che molti sen-

senza sapere l'arte della scherma abiano amazzato molti bravi hominii, io qui faccio una riflessione, e dico che pol essere, mà non tanto facile quanto si crede perche meglio è il poco sapere che l'assai possedere, che io possieda gran core e che non abia l'arte dico che l'arte pol far più che gran core, perche io avendo il gran core senza pianta ne tempo ne misura non sarò mai niente di bene; pregai sempre il Cielo, che avendo da cavar la Spada dal fodro mi mandassi un gran core senza l'arte, e non un flematico con più arre¹⁴ di me, perche dico che quando ti succedesse tal disgratia ti poi tegolare¹⁵ senza pericolo, & è questo prima devi schivar l'occasione di cavar la Spada con uno che intende poco l'arte, perche se ti ferisse perdi tutta la tua reputatione, e se lo ferisse lui ò lo mazzi non aquistarai niente di onore è succedendoti di cavar la Spada non scherzar mai con lui ne con tagli, perche non conoscendo il pericolo si pol investire ò lassarsi di incontro e ti pol svergognare, ma dico che si deve ben piantarsi in guardia, e coprirsi, è se tira da disperato lascialo tirare è se entra nella misura tù ritirati in pianta sempre, che al fine avendo tirato dieci ò dodeci stochate senza cognitione, ò lo ferirai se voi, ò li piglierai la spada di mano venendoli alla presa, e lo lasciarai da ignorante come è, avendo però tu la ragione, che è base fondamentale della Spada, perche si dice che la ragione vince tutto, che sia vero qui darò un gran consiglio à tutti d'un caso che ò veduto in N.¹⁶ di un gran personaggio, che avendo fatto venti quatro dovesi tutti à guera fornita senza mai esser ferito, e un giovineto di tenera età con grandissima sua vergogna lo privò di vita; servirà dunque questo caso d'esempio à tutti, che chi porta Spada al fianco si deve stimare è sempre schivar l'occasione.

Quando succede la costione di notte.

La regola di far costione di notte è questa, che non si tirano mai stocate se non con il piede, e con la voce, e con la spada si cerca quella quella del nemico e trovandola si lassa sopra del suo filo la stocata, & è bono aver el ferarolo meglio della Targa, à chi la sà maneggiare.

Per imparar à giocar la Bandiera.

Prima la Bandiera che farai, deve esser tanto alta quanto sei tù, e deve essere ben contrapesata tanto di piombo quanto di legno, tanto deve pesar un palmo del piombo quanto tutta l'Asta & a tutte le tue passate che farai fa li sempre fare il scartosso alla Bändiera, & impararai tanto con la destra quanto con la sinistra, e cosi potrai imparare à giocar ancora due con facilità.

Tutte le sorte de guardie devono essere buone à quelli che sano qualche cosa dico l'Italiane esser le meglio.

Chi volesse descrivere il tutto minuto per minuto sarebbe come chi volesse andar cercando la Fenice nel fondo del mare, che sò certo che quando cercasse quel gran Oceano cercarrebbe invano

Facciamo una cosa ben fatta che ogni uno pigli bene le sue misure &c.

IL FINE.





Endnotes

1. The “u” in *quelli* is inverted as “n”.
2. A misprint of *stato*.
3. The “u” in *quelle* is inverted as “n”.
4. Presumably standing for *Serenissima Dominante*, two appellatives traditionally attributed to Venice.
5. A misprint of *mio*.
6. A misprint of *piede*.
7. A misprint of *correre*.
8. A misprint of *li*.
9. From the context and surrounding clauses, presumably this is a misprint of *trovano*.
10. A misprint of *facendo*.
11. The “n” in *perfettioni* is inverted as “u”.
12. A misprint of *guardia*.
13. Presumably a garbled rendition of *vicino al ferro*.
14. A misprint of *arte*.
15. Presumably a misprint of *regolare*.
16. Presumably standing for *Napoli* (Naples).

Note to the Translation

Colombani's style of writing is relatively plain and succinct by the standard of its day. The intention has been to produce a work that is both clear and faithful to the tone of the original, accepting that some ambiguities are to be expected in a short treatise such as this. The main decisions made in presenting this translation are summarised below:

- Aside from the title page, and the beginning and end of the work, the erratic changes in font size, italicisation and spacing have been standardised. In contrast to the original subheadings are in bold italics.
- The font size has been increased and the cramped typesetting of the original has been revised with modern paragraphing and punctuation.
- While endnotes have been used for the transcription (to help approximate the presentation to that of the original) footnotes have been used for the translation, for greater immediacy.
- All words presented in the original Italian have been italicised. The majority of these have been left without further explanation, being terms that recur frequently in contemporary treatises. A few however, in particular those open to interpretation, have been mentioned in the footnotes.
- The variety of grammatical tenses, moods, passive forms and dependant clauses typical of contemporary Italian texts have been translated with a view towards clarity and fluidity in modern English.
- The plates reproduced from Marozzo, being ornamental to the text and included with the transcription, have not been represented with the translation.

Translation of L'Arte maestra by Giuseppe Colombani:

The Master Art

OF
GIUSEPPE COLOMBANI
KNOWN AS
THE LOMBARD ENSIGN

By which all people are shown how to wield the sword,
dagger, cloak, halberd, flag and two-handed *spadone*,
with ease, with the rules that should be followed
by one who finds himself with his
sword drawn, in order to defend
and protect himself.

A work useful to all

DEDICATED
TO THE INCOMPARABLE MERIT
OF THE YOUTH OF VENICE.

IN VENICE , M. DCCXI.
Printed by Miloco.
WITH PERMISSION FROM THE AUTHORITIES

TO THE READER.

I know dear reader, that I am too eager in wishing to present this feeble labour of mine before your eyes. If it is true however, that great men are not disdainful of small offerings, then please enjoy this meagre effort, which I hope through your heart you will deign to consider, read, and find to be a work necessary for all those who seek to defend and safeguard their lives, showing the correct path towards acquiring the true blows, and understanding of the sword.

I can only say that I have toiled all of my youth, but since many good and able masters have practised, I do not presume to speak except to those under the discipline of talented men. I therefore seek to instruct to each of those who desire to know all of the rules of the sword, or rather not all of them, but the most vital and principal among them: with the sword alone, with the sword and dagger, sword and targa, and sword and cloak; how to behave in combat at night, how to comport yourself in an affray, what to do to defeat without any doubt someone with a great heart but who does not possess the true science of the sword; what you must do when attacked by someone wielding a spontoon or halberd, how to defend yourself with the sword and overcome him.

Furthermore how to wield a halberd against a sword, how to wield a two-handed spadone or long sword in the midst of many swords, the true method of using the pole for the plays of the flag and pike; the true knowledge of which is the best posture of all, since I have practised with all of them; how to comport yourself when playing with those of other nations, what to do when fighting against a sabre, how to deal with grapples and disarms.

This work can truly bring you great benefit, having first learned however sound principles from good masters, with figures of the most important positions and guards. And live in happiness.

A simple method of learning how to attack well and wield arms correctly, through which the student should apply himself and work diligently; it is not his spirit or even his skill that will bring him success however, but merely a little judgement, since spirit and quickness count for little without the art

Because if an untrained fencer on occasion throws some attacks, it is only through chance. To give the student a simple method of throwing good attacks, first you must position him correctly over his legs and make him walk with both short and long steps, moving forwards and backwards. You should then show him the *forte* and *debole* of the sword, and then teach him what is meant by *quarta*, *terza*, and *seconda*.

When he is able to understand the motion of the thrusts, you should place him into the natural guard, demonstrating how he should keep a distance of two feet¹ between his left and right foot, his left knee slightly bent and his right leg fully extended, the hips in line and his body straight, with his left hand forming a circle at the height of the eye.

From this position you should have him extend an attack in *quarta*, having him release the hand in this *tempo*. You should then have him bend his right knee and straighten his left knee, if it so happens that the hand needs the help of the foot to reach the enemy's body.

You should have him advance his right foot forward half a foot and, when he is in this position, show him how to throw this thrust by turning the nails of his right hand upwards, and those of his left hand downwards. Both arms should be extended level in height along the same plane, with the feet similarly aligned, the head leaning a little to the outside of the sword.

When you have demonstrated these rules you should have him throw in *terza*, always starting with the hand and not rushing in but as I have

¹ It is unclear whether Colombani is referring to a foot's length or to a Venetian foot (a *piede*, plural *piedi*, which equated to 0.3476 metres).

already said moving the foot when it is needed by the hand. You should demonstrate how the nails of the left hand should be turned towards the ground, and those of the right hand turned towards the sky. The head should be positioned along the line of the arm, directly over the knee; because if it is not over the knee, inevitably he will drag his body towards the ground, something I have witnessed many times in the *salle*.

Next you should show them how to thrust in *seconda*, which in effect is a reversed *quarta* thrown below the line of the arm. These are the three main attacks that the student must learn well. There are others named *quinta* and *prima*,² which are not so important for the student to see until his initial efforts are completed, which I will speak of when the time comes.

Once the student is stable on his feet, understands the motion of the first three blows, and can execute them very well, you should show him the parries and the attacks which accompany them. Firstly you should show him how to parry the sword's *forte* to the inside of his weapon, which is performed by lifting the hand. The attack for this parry is a *mezza botta* carried out in two *tempi*, or else a *quarta rotta*,³ which you will demonstrate over the course of eight days.

When you see he is adept at this, you will defend against the *mezza botta* with the parry of the sword's point, which you should show him along with the attacks that accompany it. These are a feint inside the weapons before throwing underneath, or else a feint in *quarta* before throwing in *terza*.

These are the parries of the sword to be performed, and the attacks which follow these types of parry, that you should show your student and have

² Note in this first instance *quinta* is spelled as *quinte* in Colombani's original, perhaps not coincidentally following the French orthography; although the second time it is mentioned the standard Italian spelling *quinta* is used.

³ Literally "broken fourth (guard)", while not described it perhaps refers to a *quarta* "en rompant", i.e. while breaking measure.

him throw in the space of a month. When he is proficient with these you will teach him the parries over the sword, firstly those in which the arm is raised. You should show him this parry, for which you should throw a feint to the head, then a thrust in *seconda*.

When he has learned all of this well, you should demonstrate how to parry the point to the outside of the weapons. You should have him feint to the outside, before thrusting to the inside, or else perform a feint in *terza* followed by a thrust in *quarta*.

These are the principle parries and attacks you should teach your student at the beginning, to ensure he is accomplished ahead of giving him further lessons. He must parry with the heel, that is to say the sword's *forte*, and you should always keep your eyes open when you know he wishes to assault, so you can correct him when he errs. Similarly you should put him in posture in front of his enemy and show him how he should throw the attack, and once he has done this have him throw directly in front of you.

Once the student has had lessons for three or four months, you will show him the simplest method of throwing these attacks with greater skill, and how to overcome those who flee, rush in, and parry with their hands. Before demonstrating how to defeat these sorts of opponents however, you should teach your student the method and manner of attacking judiciously, telling him never to throw an attack without due consideration.

For example if he throws in *quarta* or *terza*, and it so happens that his attack is parried, he should think of nothing else except giving his response, carefully observing how the attack was defended. If it was defended by his opponent's *forte*, after retreating he should give a *mezza botta*; if this is parried he must think only of giving his reply.

If the enemy refuses to enter into his measure however, and this hinders his designs; you must demonstrate how, as he advances into measure and

his opponent withdraws, he must ensure he can parry his enemy's attacks and respond with vigour. When the enemy sees he has been parried, he will no longer be able to throw with such zeal, and will surrender his measure with ease.

In this manner the student can execute his intentions without difficulty inside or outside of the weapons, observing with attention the parries and attacks, which proceed as I have already noted above. If he follows these admonitions carefully he will be able to fight against any sort of person, and can be scornful of any posture.

When it is said to me that the French guards, the German guard, and the Spanish guard are more difficult to beat, these are all lunacies. A Frenchman, a German and a Spaniard have bodies similar to mine. If I know how to defend my body with a good posture, I do not see why I need to adopt their postures to defend myself from their extravagant guards. I have seen a great many of these, and I have noted that their positions do not even have any strength in them.

In respect of these guards, as I will come to explain, with time in his efforts the student will realise that what I say is the absolute truth. Although I pronounce it with my tongue, this advice follows in the footsteps of many honoured masters from this *Serenissima Dominante*⁴ and from other locations. Before arriving at the attacks that I have used against these guards however, I will describe the method suggested by my feeble intellect, of how to beat those who flee, rush in, and parry with their hands.

For those who flee, you should let your sword extend and take a small step to straighten your left knee, in order to find the measure and give the attack. With this method you will be successful, not neglecting to complete the blow having thrown the attack. If your opponent attacks you must parry, and give your response. If he lets his point drop low and

⁴ Literally “most serene and dominant”, the reference is to Venice itself, where the treatise was printed and where Colombani at the time resided.

wishes to raise his fist, throw an attack in *quarta* below the line of his arm, opposing him with your left hand.⁵ This is the attack known as *quinta*, or the *fianconata*.

If he keeps his point high however, you should turn your hand from *quarta* to *seconda*, then raising your hand further into the attack known as *prima*. If your opponent remains opposed to your sword, you should disengage and perform your attack; if he parries, you should execute the feint appropriate to the parry he employs, either inside or outside the sword, or in *seconda*.

Double feints are very effective against this sort of opponent, as long as they are well executed. The method and technique for provoking all manner of openings is as follows. You begin by throwing an attack from a firm foot, either in *quarta* or *terza*. If your enemy parries, you should feint a response, considering the manner in which your blow was defended, and feinting in accordance with your enemy's parry. If again your feint is defended, you must always think to respond. You should observe how your feint was defended and, in accordance with this parry, redouble your feint, returning your point to where your enemy defended previously.

In completing this attack you should stamp your foot twice. The first stamp is performed while standing firm, and returning your point to where the first feint was parried. The second stamp is executed while extending a short step forward, straightening your left knee, while carrying your point to where the previous attack had been defended.

In this manner you will never attack with excessive fury, although you should keep your arm well extended, since there is a strong risk of being struck in the same *tempo* if you attack haphazardly. For this reason you should always perform an arrest of some sort when redoubling, so you can quickly parry anything your enemy may attempt in that *tempo*.

⁵ Presumably here Colombani is referring to some kind of grab to the hilt or wrist with the offhand.

Regarding those who rush in there is a different method. Rather than advancing you should take a small step backwards, and when you see that they wish to rush in, you should attack purposefully to wherever you see is most uncovered. In this manner your blow will never fail if you judge the measure of your sword well.

It is very effective against this sort of opponent to perform two or three stamps of the foot, the first while standing firm, the second by stepping a good half-foot forward with your right, without moving your left and with your arm extended well forward. As you recover inevitably they will advance, and you can hit them in the *tempo* in which they raise their foot, to the target you see is most uncovered, whether in *quarta*, *terza* or *seconda*. If they move in *quarta* to look for your sword, you should throw in *terza*, and if they find it in *quarta* you should throw in *terza*, while if they move in *seconda* you should throw in *seconda*.

For those those who parry with the hand you should perform a *cavazione*. They cannot employ two actions at once, that is to say parry and attack, therefore when you know that a man parries with his hand and he holds it high, wanting to parry any blow you attempt to his stomach, you should bring your hand forward and present your attack in the same *tempo*. When you see his hand approaching you should perform a *cavazione* over it with a circular motion, and if he moves his hand again thinking to meet your sword you should perform a *ricavazione* below, with the same movement.

If he has his hand near his abdomen and still wishes to parry with it, you should present your point right at his heart, and he will not fail to raise his hand in order to parry. As he does so you should put your point to the pit of his stomach with a circular movement, and if he still moves his hand to meet your sword low you should perform a *ricavazione* over it.

This is the method and manner which I employed, and which I always found very effective to beat this sort of person. You need great patience however, and much effort, because you should not believe that you can be

as accomplished as a master within a year or two, and be consummate at wielding arms. I would say that it is very difficult to find a man highly accomplished with weapons.

Returning to the Italian, German and Spanish Guards, and to the attacks I used to defeat these sorts of guards. Against the French I performed a *disordinazione*⁶ of the sword. Against the Germans I gave a *crollamento*,⁷ opposing the enemy with my left hand, sometimes with two beats, the first in *quarta* and the second crossing swords while advancing with a small step, as well as performing many double feints since they attack the sword often.

Against Spaniards, since they always follow with their rear foot, I performed a *cavazione* of the sword upon contact, sometimes in two *tempi*, closing measure with a short step. You must pay attention to your head when dealing with a Spaniard, because there is no parrying these attacks, since they throw only at the eye, saying that they are more capable when aiming for the eye rather than the middle of the stomach.

You should also keep in mind to watch your opponent's responses as well as his attacks, that is to say observe how the enemy parries your counter. If he parries it by raising his arm, you should give him a *mezza botta*, if he parries the point you should perform a *cavazione*, and if he parries the *cavazione* you should feint in the manner I demonstrated above in discussing the attacks.

To execute everything well however, including these responses, and to deal with every sort of posture and movement, requires great effort. No man can put into practice what he knows without being able to train and exercise the movements in his mind. If we had bodies as sublime as our

6 Literally a “disordering” of the sword. While in this context it presumably indicates a beat of some sort, Marcelli (1686) uses the term *disordinata* to signify a form of approach from wide measure, employed to induce the opponent into breaking guard.

7 Literally a “shove” or “jolt” (or else a “collapse”), presumably describing a push with the left hand *corps à corps*.

thoughts, people would be perfect. Our nature is too cumbersome a machine however, and requires great effort to manage and move before it functions without fault. Nonetheless with judgement, patience and endeavour, you will always become more accomplished than many others, if you have applied yourself.

A method of defence with the sword against a sabre

Firstly if a man has good judgement he should hold his sword hand by his pocket, a foot and a half off the ground, so that the sabre cannot beat his blade. This is because the sabre seeks nothing except the blade in order to displace it, or if not the hand.

For this reason the fencer with the sword must quickly resolve, as soon as he sees the sabre fencer and is able, to throw an attack, either at the head, or at another target. He should throw feints to where he knows he can enter most easily, then quickly leap back, because if the fencer with the sword is not overly skilled, he runs a great risk of being harmed by the sabre's fury. Those who keep their guard in a straight ahead in a line however will always be wounded by the sabre, if its wielder has a modicum of experience.

To defend against a sword as long as a man, with a sword half a foot shorter than your enemy's, the fencer with the shorter sword should not be intimidated by his opponent's feints, whether *mezze botte*⁸ or provocations. Instead as soon as the enemy performs an attack he should quickly parry and close measure, or find the sword, observing the *cavazioni* as he closes measure.

If the fencer with the shorter sword throws an attack at his enemy he must then quickly jump backwards, while raising his sword, since his opponent could still wound him easily. If the fencer with the short sword however, due to his great spirit, wishes to carry his blow from distance he runs a risk. This is because his enemy can hold firm with the significant

8 Spelled dialectally in Colombani's original as *meze botte*, the plural of *mezza botta*.

advantage of his weapon, and on being tormented by attacks whose force he might not be able to parry, he becomes obliged to extend his arm and thrust.

On grappling

Good judgement is required by those who wish to leap at the body. You should only attempt this when your enemy overextends himself in carrying out his attack. Seeing him slow to recover, you can seize the *tempo* and employ the grapple.

To defend yourself with a sword against a halberd

The fencer with the sword is advised to hold it firmly in the hand, and to grasp the middle of the blade with his left hand. If the enemy throws to the inside, you should parry with your right and perform an *inquartata* with your body. If he throws to the outside you should parry, passing with your left foot to his right in order to grapple him, which will succeed without any doubt.

Sword and cloak, sword and buckler

Once the student has a good understanding of the sword alone, having taken lessons from a good master, he will be able to quickly and very easily learn the sword and dagger, sword and cape and sword and *targa*, noting that all three consist of but one play.

He has only to ensure that all of his body is over his left foot, and that the sword is held at his thigh, as low as possible while still being usable. As for his left hand, the point of the dagger should be aimed at the enemy's throat, seeking to unsettle the enemy, so he leaves himself open to a straight thrust either to the outside or inside, whichever is easiest. He should take practice defending against attacks from a good fencer for at least fifteen days, in order to learn how to parry with a dagger in his left hand, and likewise with the cape, *targa* and hat.

Method of wielding the halberd against a sword, or in the midst of many swords

If it happens that you must retrieve a halberd from your house or workshop to confront a sword, you should grasp the bottom of the halberd with your right hand, with your left hand in the middle. Your right foot should be back and your left foot forward, with your right arm well withdrawn. When you release a thrust you should immediately pull your attack back, and you should never swing the halberd when you know that the swordsman is accomplished, because he will be able to close to the grapple with ease.

In wishing to join a combat with a halberd you should grasp it a *palmo*⁹ from its head. By then using *montanti*,¹⁰ while moving around at speed, you can enter into the fray without danger, the halberd being no more than a *palmo* taller than its wielder.

The rule for the two-handed spadone against multiple swords

This applies both to a two-handed *spadone* and to long sword. Finding yourself assailed by enemies, and supposing that there are many of them, the situation demands nothing else but attacks like those of a desperate man, that is to say you must enter liberally into the fray. You should never throw thrusts with the point, except at an opponent who seems weaker, instead throwing *roversi*, such attacks keeping you always in motion, this being the true method of defending yourself.

⁹ A Venetian *palmo* was an antique unit of measurement, equating to 0.3774 metres.

¹⁰ In generic terms an ascending cut. Some authors e.g. Manciolino (1531) and Marozzo (1536) specify that this cut is made with the false edge, while for others (e.g. Altoni (circa 1540) and Capoferro (1610)) it refers to an ascending true-edge cut.

To defend yourself against one with a great spirit, but who possesses little knowledge of fencing

In all the world where I practised, I heard of many instances of men with no knowledge of fencing having killed valiant men. Here I will reflect, and say that it is possible, but not as easy as some believe, because knowing a little is better than having a lot. If I had a great spirit without the art, I would say that the art can achieve more than a great spirit, because in having a great spirit without posture, *tempo* and measure I would never in any way be accomplished.

Having to draw my sword from its sheath, I would always pray that heaven might send me an opponent with great spirit but no art (rather than a phlegmatic one with more art than me) because when you are beset by a misadventure such as this you can overcome it without danger.

You should first however try and avoid drawing your sword against one who understands little of the art. If you are wounded your entire reputation is lost but if you wound or kill him it will grant you no honour. If you must draw your sword though, never jest with him or throw cuts, because in not understanding the danger he could charge forward, or leave himself in front of you, whereupon he might shame you.

I advise instead that you stand put yourself well in guard and stay covered. If he strikes desperately let him throw, and if he enters into measure you should retreat while always in guard. In the end, after he has thrown ten or twelve thrusts without effect, you can either wound him if you wish, or take his sword by coming to the grapple and leave him for the ignorant that he is. Reason will be yours however, as reason is the foundation of the art of the sword, since it is said that reason conquers all.

This being so, I will now give some important advice, from a case I saw in Naples. A great personage, who had completed twenty four combats without ever being injured, was wounded by a young lad of tender years, who to his great shame took his life. May this instance therefore serve as

an example to all those who carry a sword at their side, that it is always better to be circumspect and avoid such situations.

When combat takes place at night

The rule for combat at night is as follows. You should never thrust except with your foot, and you should seek your enemy's sword by sound and with your sword, and once you find it releasing your thrust over its edge. A cape is better than a *targa*, for those who know how to use it.

To learn the play of the flag

Firstly your flag should be the same height as you, and be well counterbalanced both with lead and wood, so that the whole flag weighs as much as the *palmo* of lead.¹¹ Every step that you take should be accompanied by a flourish of the flag, and you should practice with your left as well as your right. In this manner you can also learn without difficulty to play with two flags.

Every sort of guard should be good for those with some knowledge, but I say the Italian guards are the best.

Those who wish to describe everything in great detail are like those who would seek the Phoenix at the bottom of the sea, since I am sure that if they searched that vast ocean, they would do so in vain. It is better to do one thing well, and let everyone take stock, etc.

T H E E N D .

¹¹ The butt of a sbandieratore's flag is still referred to as a *piombo* (literally a "lead"), from the period when all such flags were counterbalanced with lead.

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