

# Introduction to Period Rapier Manuals & Documentation

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A wide variety of rapier manuals both written in and about our period are available. This class will discuss many of the easier to find and understand resources both in hard copy and on the web. Learning the skills of 16<sup>th</sup> Century Fencing Masters is an excellent way to improve and polish your SCA rapier technique and understanding of our art.

For the purpose of this overview, we'll describe six categories of manuals. These are all potentially useful in your studies, for different reasons. We'll also give you a very quick listing of particularly notable period masters as a starting point for your reading. Finally, we'll discuss and pass around many of the resources from our own collections. If people have brought other resources we'd love to have those discussed as well.

## Types of Rapier Resources

**Reproduction.** This is a straight copy of a period publication, generally with period typesetting and illustrations. A significant portion of these manuals are in Italian or German, but even an English manual can be difficult to read due to archaic language, spelling and typesettings.

**Translation or Transcription:** These are literal updatings of period sources to modern language and typesetting. These can be much easier to read and understand compared to the reproductions but the translator may introduce some misunderstandings. Period translations, particularly of Italian manuals, also exist.

**Adaptations** are theoretical manuals based on period ideas re-explained by an out of period author using his own words. These books are perhaps the easiest introduction to some of the basics of period fencing. Once these basics are acquired, the student should dig deeper in to the specifics of the master(s) that they have developed an interest in.

A **history** book describes related period practices such as rapier academies or dueling etiquette. They could be written in or out of period and are great for learning the background and setting of our art.

The **SCA** category of books consists of a modern author describing a homogenized period-ish technique without specific discussion of any period sources. They may contain useful skills.

**Modern** fencing books are focused on sport/Olympic fencing, but still may have useful insights for the SCA fencer. Some of the drills and discussion of mental preparation may be of particular use.

## Period Masters of Particular Note

A majority of the period masters were Italian and thus were originally published in Italian. Many of the better known were translated into English. Names to look for include **Camillo Agrippa**, **Ridolfo Capo Ferro**, and **Salvator Fabris**. **Giacomo di Grassi** was translated into English in period. **Vincentio Saviolo** was an Italian who moved to London and published his book in English.

**Hieronimo de Caranza**, was a Spaniard who is considered the father of the Spanish style. **Gerard Thibault d'Anvers** was a Frenchman who taught in the Spanish style. **George Silver** was an Englishman who argued against the foreign rapier techniques and for the shorter English swords. Englishman **Joseph Swetnam** was more of a rapier fan. Fencing manuals were also published in German with **Joachim Meyer** being a notable master.

A fair number of rapier manuals saw first printing in the early 17<sup>th</sup> Century, which is technically out of the SCA period. But, if their authors had been teaching rapier theory for decades, then took a few years to write and publish a book on their experience, you can feel sure that much of the book describes techniques used in period.

In depth study of the technique of a particular master can take considerable time and dedication. Selecting an appropriate master can be difficult. One approach is to select one whose approach and terminology meshes well with the student's personal style. Another approach is the opposite: to expand your understanding of the arte in a new and, perhaps, difficult direction. A prospective student can survey the available choices through classes like this, discussions with other students of the arte, web searches for free documentation, or by spending money to accumulate a personal library.

## A Cautionary Tale

Armed with the list of books in the attached bibliography, the list of period masters in the prior section, and the starter weblinks below, a fantastic wealth of period rapier knowledge is just a Google search away. Go to your favorite search engine and type in **Saviolo translation** or the name of your favorite master (make sure you spell the name right!). Please be aware, however, that these resources do move around and that the links you may find may not go to the cool Fabris translation you were looking for, but rather something that is not safe for viewing at work. In doing the research for this class we found several such inappropriate links. Be prepared. The web links provided below were safe at the time this class was prepared.

## Some Web Sites to Start

The Association for Renaissance Martial Arts (ARMA)'s manual listing:  
<http://www.thearma.org/manuals.htm>

Don Danulf's Academy of Defence Online resource listing:  
<http://www.musketeer.org/online.html>

William Wilson's list of Period Masters and Links  
<http://www2.nau.edu/~wew/fencing/masters.html>

The Longsword Fencing Site with German manual translations  
<http://www.schielhau.org/>

## A Little Light Reading

*Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals*, Di Grassi, Saviolo, Silver, ISBN 0820111074, \$75. A **reproduction** of three period masters' manuals in English. Hard to read due to period language and typesetting.

*Italian Rapier Combat*, Capo Ferro, 1610, ISBN 1853675806, \$40. A modern **translation** by Jared Kirby.

*Art of Dueling*, Salvator Fabris, 1606, ISBN 1891448234, \$40. A wonderful modern **translation** by Tom Leoni

*Academy of the Sword*, Gerard Thibault d'Anvers, 1630, John Michael Greer ISBN 1891448404, \$60. A very nice modern **translation**.

*Medieval Combat: A Fifteenth-Century Illustrated Manual of Swordfighting and Close-Quarter Combat*, Hans Talhoffer, 1467, Mark Rector, ISBN 1853675822, \$16. Modern **translation** and **reproduction** of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century "fight-book" showing techniques for a wide variety of weapons forms. The bulk of the book is full page copies of the original with a translated caption for each page.

*The Renaissance Drill Book*, Jacob de Gheyn, ISBN 185367561X, \$25. Interesting **historic** period wood cut Pike and Musket drill flip book

*Master of Defence: The Works of George Silver*, Paul Wagner, ISBN 1581604246, \$29 (out of print?), A **reproduction** of Silver's 1599 *Paradoxes of Defence* and some modern essays, which are not well regarded in the reviews on Amazon.

*English Swordsmanship: The True Fight of George Silver, Vol 1: Single Sword*, Stephen Hand, ISBN 1891448277, \$50. Excellent modern **adaptation** of Silver's short sword techniques with hundreds of photographs showing the moves.

*Arte of Defence: An Introduction to the Use of Rapier*, William Wilson, ISBN 1891448188, \$25. An excellent modern **adaptation** of period techniques.

*Old Sword Play: Techniques of the Great masters*, Alfred Hutton, 1892, ISBN 0486419517, \$10, also available on the web. A nice **adaptation** and survey of period and post period sword masters and the basics of their styles.

*The Sword and the Centuries: 500 Years of European Swords and Duels That Have Been Fought With Them*, Alfred Hutton, 1901, ISBN 1566196906, \$20. Out of print. Widely available used. A variety of similar titles are also available, which may or may not be different books. This one is a **history** of swords and duels.

*Schools & Masters of Fencing*, Egerton Castle, ISBN 0486428265, \$17. An 1885 **adaptation** exploring a wide variety of period masters and technique.

*The Martial Arts of Renaissance Europe*, Sydney Anglo, ISBN 0300083521, \$55, An excellent modern **history** of period combat containing reproductions of hundreds of period illustrations.

*The Secret History of the Sword*, J. Christoph Amberger ISBN 1892515040, \$20. A modern book exploring the historic underpinnings of modern competitive fencing. It contains lots of excellent, but mostly post period, research in a well written narrative.

*The Moondragon Manual of Rapier Combat*, Chris Zakes, A very good **SCA** manual written by the first society rapier marshal.

WMA Illustrated, \$26.95/yr (4 issues) Quarterly magazine covering a variety of western marshal arts, some outside the scope of SCA combat, but all very interesting.

*Fighting with the German Longsword*, Christian Henry Tobler, ISBN 1891448242, \$25. An excellent modern **adaptation** of period German longsword technique. A full course with theory and drills. Lots of photos and reference to period plates and manuals.

*Medieval Sword and Shield : The Combat System of Royal Armouries MS I.33*, Paul Wagner & Stephen Hand, ISBN 1891448439, \$30. A very good modern **adaptation** of the c 1290 combat manual.

*Spada, An Anthology of Swordsmanship*, ISBN 1891448374, \$25. A collection of articles on period sword techniques.

*The Swordsman's Companion: A Manual for Training With the Medieval Longsword*, Guy Windsor, ISBN 1891448412, \$22. Excellent modern **adaptation** of period Italian longsword technique based on Fiore dei Liberi and Filippo Vadi.

*The Rapier & Small-Sword: 1460-1820*, A.V.B. Norman, ISBN 0405130899. Survey and classification of period weapons.