

Introduction to Period Rapier Manuals & Documentation

Master Llwyd Aldrydd

Baronllwyd@gmail.com, <http://baronllwyd.org>

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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 16th Century Fencing Masters is an excellent way to improve and polish your SCA rapier technique and understanding of our art.

I first taught this class in 2006. In the intervening years the interest and number of resources for western martial arts have exploded. In this latest update to the class I have twice as many period masters mentioned and have doubled my personal library and the bibliography at the end of the paper. And even having done that, a one hour class can barely attempt to cover a representative sampling and can certainly not claim to be an exhaustive exploration of the subject.

For the purpose of this overview, I'll describe six categories of manuals. These are all potentially useful in your studies, for different reasons. I'll also give you a listing of particularly notable period masters as a starting point for your reading. Finally, I'll discuss and pass around many of the resources from my own collection. If people have brought other resources I'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 typesetting.

Translation or Transcription: These are literal updates 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 English translations, particularly of Italian manuals, also exist.

Adaptations or Interpretations 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.

The line between a translation and an adaptation can be a blurry one, particularly without the original manuscript at hand. It can be difficult to determine how much of the explanation is the modern author's thoughts and how much is from the original period

source. Many of the books in my bibliography could arguably be put on the other side of the line from where I chose to categorize them.

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

The masters who are perhaps most easily adaptable to SCA rapier 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. **Vincenzo Saviolo** was an Italian who moved to London and published his book in English.

I have been focusing my own reading on the work of Italian **Fiore dei Liberi** recently. His manuals discuss a complete unified combat system including unarmed, dagger, single/one-hand sword, long/two-handed sword, axe, spear, and mounted combat. I have been particularly focused on the long sword section.

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.

There are similar German masters and systems including those of **Hans Talhoffer**, **Peter von Danzig**, **Sigmund Ringeck**, **Joachim Meyer** and **Johannes Liechtenauer** and that found in the **Codex Wallerstein. I.33** is a famous German manuscript focusing on sword and buckler technique. If German techniques are of particular interest, the terms “Fechtbuch” or “Fechtbücher” (fight book(s)) may produce useful Google results.

A fair number of rapier manuals saw first printing in the early 17th 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.

Many of the books discussed and shown in this class have gone in and out of print multiple times. Very limited print runs and small but motivated audiences can occasionally result in people asking over \$1000 for a copy of an out of print \$40 book. Just be patient and keep your eyes open and you'll frequently be able to locate a copy for a more reasonable amount.

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>

A very long bibliography with links:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fechtbuch#German_Fechtb.C3.BCcher

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/>

Freelance Academy Press
<http://www.freelanceacademypress.com/>

A Little Light Reading

Reproductions

Three Elizabethan Fencing Manuals, Di Grassi, Saviolo, Silver, ISBN 0820111074, \$75. This is a reproduction of three period masters' manuals in English. It can be hard to read due to period language and typesetting.

Translations

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

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

Fencing: A Renaissance Treatise, Camillo Agrippa, Ken Mondschein, 2009, ISBN 1599101297, \$19. Translation of Agrippa's 1553 manual with an extensive and well researched introduction.

Fiore de' Liberi's Fior di Battaglia M.S. Getty Ludwig XV 13 Italian Swordsmanship Treatise, Leoni, Tom, \$30, I have an edition labeled "rev 4". A later "2nd English Edition" is available from Freelance Academy Press. This is an excellent translation of the text from the Getty copy of Fiore. My copy has no illustrations at all.

A Gentleman's Guide to Duelling: Of Honour and Honourable Quarrels, Vincentio Saviolo, Jared Kirby, 2014, ISBN 1848325274, \$30. 1594 book on conducting duels with 2014 biography and annotations.

Italian Rapier Combat, Capo Ferro's Gran Simulacro, Kirby, Jared 1610, ISBN 1853675806, \$40. This is a modern translation including excellent reproductions of the original plates.

The 'Lost' Second Book of Nicoletto Giganti(1608): A Rapier Fencing Treatise, by Nicoletto Giganti (Author), Piermarco Terminiello and Joshua Pendragon (Translators), 2013, ISBN 1909348317, \$18. 2013 Translation of a 1608 Italian rapier book.

Medieval Combat: A Fifteenth-Century Illustrated Manual of Swordfighting and Close-Quarter Combat, Talhoffer, Hans, 1467, Mark Rector, ISBN 1853675822, \$16. Modern translation and reproduction of the 15th 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.

Nicoletto Giganti's The School of the Sword: A New Translation, Aaron Taylor Miedema, 2014, ISBN 192753707X, \$17 Translation and adaptation of Giganti's 1619 manual

Ridolfo Capoferro's The Art and Practice of Fencing: A Practical Translation for the Modern Swordsman, Leoni, Tom, ISBN 978-0-9825911-9-2, \$25, An excellent translation of Capoferro's work with very good reproductions of the original plates.

The Single Sword of Henry de Saint Didier, Henry de Saint-Didier, Robert Preston Hyatt and Devin Wilson, 2009, ISBN 1581607040, \$26. Translation and interpretation of 1573 French manual.

Venetian Rapier, The School, or Salle: Nicoletto Giganti's 1606 Rapier Fencing Curriculum, Leoni, Tom, \$20, An excellent modern translation of Giganti's text with plates.

Veni Vadi Vici, A transcription, translation and commentary of Filippo Vadi's De Arte Gladiatoria Dimicandi, Guy Windsor, 2013, ISBN 9529316860, \$21. C 1482 Italian manual describing an evolution from Fiore and Liechtenaur's earlier work with excellent translation and explanation by Windsor.

Adaptations

Arte of Defence: An Introduction to the Use of Rapier, William Wilson, ISBN 1891448188, \$25. This is an excellent modern adaptation of period techniques with influences from a variety of period masters. It is an excellent starting point.

The Duellist's Companion: A training manual for 17th century Italian rapier, Windsor, Guy, ISBN 978-1-891448-32-4, \$22. A very well referenced and explained approach to learning rapier with strong reliance and reference to Capo Ferro's work.

English Swordsmanship, The True Fight of George Silver, Vol.1: Single Sword, Hand, Stephen, ISBN 1-891448-27-7, \$50. This is a very good adaptation of Silver's single sword system with lots of photos illustrating stances and moves.

Fighting with the German Longsword, Christian Henry Tobler, ISBN 1891448242, \$25. This is an excellent modern adaptation of period German longsword technique based on Liechtenauer. It's a full course with theory and drills. There are lots of photos and reference to period plates and manuals.

Fiore dei Liberi's Armizare: The Chivalric Martial Arts System of Il Fior Di Battaglia, Charrette, Robert N., ISBN: 978-0-9825911-7-8, \$40, A fantastic exploration of Fiore's complete system with small reproductions of plates, lots of photographs, and very good explanations of the technique. It also compares the differences in illustrations between different surviving copies of the work.

Fiore dei Liberi's Sword in Two Hands: A full-color training guide for the Medieval Longsword, Price, Brian R., ISBN 1-891448-13-7, \$50, A very pretty interpretation of Fiore's longsword system with lots of photographs.

Filo Dritto: An Italian Battlefield Methodology, I.M. Davis, 2014, ISBN 1494719673, \$4.49 Merges Italian masters Marozzo and Saviolo's systems into an integrated technique.

The Knightly Art of Battle, Mondschein, Ken, ISBN 978-1-60606-076-6, \$15. This book contains fantastic high resolution reproductions of the illustration plates from the Getty museum's copy of the manuscript. The descriptions are less useful to the combat student. This would be a great addition to Tom Leoni's translation of Fiore.

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

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

Schools & Masters of Fencing, Castle, Egerton, ISBN 0486428265, \$17. This is an 1885 adaptation exploring a wide variety of period (and some post-period) masters and technique.

Spada, An Anthology of Swordsmanship, ISBN 1891448374, \$25. This is an anthology collection of articles on period sword techniques.

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

WMA Illustrated, \$26.95/yr (4 issues) Quarterly magazine covering a variety of western martial arts, some outside the scope of SCA combat, but all very interesting. Only 3 issues were published.

History

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 NOBLE ART OF THE SWORD: Fashion and Fencing in Renaissance Europe 1520-1630, Tobias Capwell, 2012, ISBN 0900785438, \$41. Beautiful photographs cataloging a Wallace Collection exhibition of arms, armor, clothing and manuals.

The Rapier & Small-Sword: 1460-1820, A.V.B. Norman, ISBN 0405130899. This is an exhaustive survey and classification of period weapons.

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

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 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.

SCA

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