

## A Swordsman's Introduction to *Fior di Battaglia*

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### 1. Introduction

The purpose of this introduction is to provide the reader with a guide to the basic principles behind interpreting the core techniques of the system of foot combat presented in *Fior di Battaglia*, written in 1409 by Fiore dei Liberi for Niccolo d'Este, the Marquis of Ferrara, recently republished in glorious colour by Massimo Malipiero. There is no need for a complete, blow-by blow run through of every technique and play because that has already been done by Fiore himself; the modern reader simply needs a introduction to the underlying themes of the system for interpretation of individual plays to become fairly straightforward.

As historical martial artists we make an act of faith: the writer of the source knew his art better than we do. It is often the case that the instructions presented in the manuscripts are obscure or counter-intuitive to us modern readers; I think it is important to remember that mistakes in training for us lead to a few bruises perhaps, and a lost match or two. For Fiore and his students, the consequences of an error could be death, disgrace, or ruin. I think that with that kind of incentive, the chances are that when it comes to swordsmanship and knightly combat, the knights knew what they were doing.

### 2. The Structure of Fior di Battaglia .

This is a vast and complex treatise, covering an enormous range of weapons combinations, techniques, counters and fundamental concepts. As it was written in 1409, it comes from a different cultural and educational background to our own, one in which memory training was fundamental. As a result the lack of discussion in the work, and the way the information is presented, can be stumbling blocks to the

modern reader. The sheer amount of information presented is daunting, and as it is spread over some 90-odd sides of vellum (conventionally numbered 1 to 47 recto and verso)<sup>1</sup>, keeping the structure clear in your head as you read can be difficult. What I have attempted to do here is first describe the overall content of the work, and then identify certain repeating elements, in an attempt to make the entire work more accessible to the reader. I am assuming that the reader in question is more concerned with reconstructing the fighting art contained in the treatise than in paleographical or linguistic concerns.

The first 3 written sides (page 3 recto and verso, page 4 recto) are taken up with a text-only introduction. This covers the following points:

A brief biography of Fiore himself,

A list of his more famous students and some of their feats of arms

A brief discussion of the secret nature of the art, and Fiore's opinions about different modes of combat (fighting in the lists, versus fighting in arming doublets with sharp swords)

A further description of Fiore's training, and his opinions regarding the necessity of books in general for mastering the art.

A connection of Fiore himself and the book with higher authority (Nicolo, Marquis of Este) who commissioned the work,

An overview of the book and it's didactic conventions: beginning with some background information on wrestling, and advice to the student on what is required.

Discussion of *posta*: "...*E tanto e adire posta cho modo de apostar lo inimigo suo per offenderlo senca priculo di se instesso*" (... which is as much to say *posta* is a method of lying in wait for your enemy in order to offend him without danger to yourself")

A description of the crown and garter convention: the masters beginning each section stand in guard, and wear the crown to indicate their masterly status. They are the first masters. Following from them is a remedy master (also called the second master), who illustrates a defence to an attack. Following him are his scholars, who are identified by a garter, that execute the techniques that follow the remedy. After them comes a counter-remedy master (the third master), with a crown and a garter, who illustrates the counter to that remedy, or to a specific scholar. Occasionally, there is a fourth master, who may be called the counter-counter-remedy master, who wears the crown

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1 These Latin terms are the technical names for the front and back surfaces of a page: the *recto* is the right-hand (usually odd-numbered) page in an open book, and the back of that page (which, when the page is turned, becomes the left-hand page, usually even-numbered) is the *verso*. Definition from The Columbia Guide to Standard American English (<http://www.bartleby.com/68/33/5033.html>)

Also it is worth noting that the pagination in general use and which I am using here is different to that employed by the Getty museum; because the first page has a three written into the corner, we number the treatise from page three onwards; the Getty numbers the pages from the first extant page. Malipiero gives both uses, the Getty's version in brackets.

and garter too. Fiore specifies that most sequences don't get beyond the third master (i.e. the attack is met by the remedy, which the attacker counters), and it is perilous (perhaps because it is insecure) to go beyond three or four.

The finish to the introduction is particularly interesting: "*Ben che le rubriche e le figure eli zoghi mostrarana tutta l'arte si bene che tutta la si pora inteniere*" (Anyway, the rubric and the figures and the plays will reveal all of the art so well that everything can be understood). In other words, this book should be enough to transmit the art completely. A bold claim, and one that is borne out I think, once the conventions are understood.

Directly after the introduction begins the illustrated treatise. Each page is divided in quarters, with an illustration (usually) in each quarter. On one page there are five illustrations, arranged like the five mark on a die; on two others, the entire page is given over to one core illustration (the so-called 'segno' pages, the first illustrating the blows of the dagger, and the second illustrating the blows of the sword). 5 pages have only 3 illustrations, usually at the end of a given section. 4 have only two, either at the beginning of a section (such as the sword in two hands) or at the end. For techniques on foot, each play, including (usually) two combatants, occupies one quarter, so we get four plays per page. The primary exceptions to this are the three occasions where a lone warrior faces three opponents which occupies two quarters (one for the defender, one for the three attackers). Mounted combat naturally occupies more space in the early stages; so the first 12 plays occupy 6 pages; once the combatants have closed enough to strike with the sword, or to grapple, the plays are again shown four to a page.

The first illustrated page (page 6 recto) shows the four unarmed guards (*poste*): *longa*, *dente di zenghiar*<sup>1</sup>, *porta di ferro*, and *frontale*. These are the base upon which the entire system is built. There are of course more than four possible positions for the body, but it is standard medieval practice to begin a work with a base of four things (such as the four gospels, the four humours of the body, the four cardinal directions, etc.). We often find such culturally pervasive numbers in the treatise; which are generally understood to be an aid to memory. Medieval texts are usually structured so that they can be memorised more easily; for further information on this refer to Carruthers.<sup>2</sup>

There follows twenty plays of *abrazare* (wrestling), including the first (and only) remedy master (play 1) and three counter-remedy masters, at plays 6, 14 and 16. The last four plays of *abrazare* are done with the *bastone*, a short stick. The first two are against an unarmed person, the second pair against a dagger attack, while seated on a bench. Interestingly, these are versions of the sixth and eighth masters of the dagger, as is stated in the text. Already, Fiore is tying the disparate sections together, which suggests that they are meant to be considered all parts of one whole art. Furthermore, the text wrongly ascribes the masters; the defence of the sixth dagger master is shown

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1 The spelling of various words, *zenghiar* amongst them, can vary from instance to instance. I have attempted to reproduce the spelling accurately in each quotation rather than adapt Fiore's words to our modern notions on standardisation.

2 The mnemonic devices in this treatise were first pointed out to me by Bob Charron, who also put me onto Carruthers.

where the text states the eighth, and vice versa. A salutary reminder that a) no one is perfect and b) the numbering system is just an aide memoire, not some complex and perfect code.

Then the dagger section proper begins, with five ways of holding *porta di ferro* with and without the dagger (discussed below), followed by a page showing the four principal lines of attack, and incidentally the only instance of the guard position drawn from the front. This is followed by a page showing four masters, each embodying the four main technical options for defence against the dagger: the disarm, limb destruction, lock and/or counterlock and the takedown. The plays are covered in 76 illustrations, and are divided into the plays of nine remedy masters, each with their own specific cover or tactical choice.

Numbering the plays is not as straight-forward as it may appear: the question is whether the remedy master counts as a play or not. In terms of actions, it clearly does, as the text usually includes some kind of action that follows the cover, and is distinct from the play in the next illustration. For instance in the text above the first remedy master Fiore writes: "*E per questa che meglio non si po fare la tua daga faro andar in terra, voltando la mia mane a parte sinistra*" (And better than this one cannot make, I make your dagger go to the ground, (by) turning my hand to the left). However in the 13th play of the sword at *zogho stretto*, as shown on page 29 verso, Fiore refers back to the second play of the first master of dagger, the *ligadura mezana*, which is shown in the third illustration; this would suggest the numbering begins after the remedy master. However, on page 19 recto (top right), he refers to the *ligadura mezana* as the third play of the first master of dagger. How do we resolve this? Which is correct?

If we take the *abrazare* section as a model, we see four crowned masters (the four unarmed *poste*), then a crowned remedy master (the so-called second master), followed by 19 scholars including three counter-remedy masters (hence third masters). The plays are numbered within their explanatory paragraphs, and it is stated that the remedy master's action is the first play, his first scholar shows the second play, etc. Therefore the remedy master is the first play, and the reference on 29 verso is another numerical error.

Studying the plays of mounted combat, we see an apparent contradiction, where he numbers nine plays (on pages 44 recto to 45 recto) that follow a specific guard (*coda longa*, shown by a crowned master on page 43 verso). However this is resolved if we consider that the master in *coda longa* is not a remedy-master; he does not show a cover or defence, just the guard. Given that this comes after the sword, spear and pollax sections in which a multitude of covers are illustrated, we may assume that Fiore expects us to know how to make the cover from that position, rendering an illustration of the remedy redundant. Just as in the previous sections, the crowned masters illustrating the guards with no contact with another figure do not count as plays; the remedy and counter-remedy masters do.

It may be useful to note that either the number of plays of a given remedy master, or the number of his scholars, are often particularly good numbers for mnemonic purposes.

By far the largest subsection is that of the first remedy master, who is followed by 20 scholars, including eleven counter-remedy masters (who occur at plays 2, 4, 6, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 17, 19, and 21). These 20 scholars cover every type of action (disarms, locks, counterlocks, arm breaks, and takedowns, and counters to the above). The 21 plays can be remembered for instance as three groups of seven; three and seven being common figures in Western thought (trinities pervade European culture, and we have seven days of the week, seven deadly sins, etc.).

The second remedy master has only three scholars, of which two are counter-remedies (plays 2 and 4). The third has six scholars, of which the last is a counter-remedy. The fourth again has six, of which the last is a counter-remedy. The fifth has 12 scholars, of which again the last is a counter-remedy. The sixth has seven scholars, of which the sixth is a counter-remedy. The seventh has only one scholar, which is a counter-remedy (perhaps because, as is stated in the text, this cover should only be done in armour). The eighth has three scholars, of which the second and third are alternative ways of making the cover, and the first is a counter-remedy (incidentally, the counter-remedy is described as a push to the elbow but depicted as a push to the hand: both work beautifully). The ninth and final master is followed by nine scholars, and no counter-remedy masters are shown, though the text in the final play contains instructions for the counter. Note that the number of scholars is one less than the number of plays; the first scholar shows the second play, etc.

We should note here that the page numbers we are using are as the manuscript is currently bound; it is clear from the content of page 40, which contains the fourth and fifth masters of the dagger, that this page became detached at some point in the manuscript's history and was rebound in the wrong place. It belongs between pages 16 and 17. It is conceivable that this page was originally drawn in its current place, but given the overall attention to detail, and the logical progression of the material, I find this latter vanishingly unlikely. Careful examination of the original manuscript may solve the question once and for all, but access to it is extremely difficult to obtain.

The next section begins with the dagger defending against a sword attack: there is only one guard adopted (and called *dente de cenghiaro*). Three plays follow, of which the first is the defence against a sword thrust, the second the swordsman's counter-remedy, and the third the defence against a descending cut to the head. The section continues with five illustrations showing defence of the sword against the dagger. The first illustration shows a sword remedy master with his sword in its scabbard held point up, menaced by an attacker with a dagger. The text that accompanies this is priceless:

*Questo e un partito de daga contra spada. Quello che a daga e tene quello della Spada per lo cavezo, dise io te feriro cum mia daga inanci che tu cavi la Spada dela guagina. E quello de la spada dise tra' pure che son aparechiado. E come quello de la daga vol trare quello de la spada fa secondo ch'è depento qui driedo.*

This is one technique of dagger against sword. The one who has the dagger holds the swordsman by the collar, saying "I will strike you with my dagger before you can draw

your sword from the scabbard". And he with the sword says: "Attack as you will for I am prepared". And as the one with the dagger attacks, the one with the sword does the second (play), which is depicted hereafter. (page 19 verso)

This is a classic example of the technique of personalising the images, to make them easier to remember. The conversation is entirely unnecessary from a technical point of view, but illuminates the characters of the players, rendering them more whole, and thus more memorable. I make my students say the lines (with feeling!) for the same reason. Once said, never forgotten. This section ends on page 20 recto, and the top right quarter is left blank. The bottom half of the page has the beginning of the sword in one hand section. Leaving the blank space where another play might have been inserted suggests to me that the section is complete; Fiore chooses to include no further expansion or variations. It is obvious to any martial artist that there are many possible further actions in the context given (dagger against sword): however, the main points have clearly been covered. We have seen dagger defence against cut and thrust (one defence for each); the counter-remedy against the dagger after thrusting with the sword; and three defences with the sword in the scabbard, one descending, two ascending.

The basic mechanic of the final play of the sword against the dagger (beginning with the sword in its scabbard) is the same as that of the cover of the sword in one hand. This section begins with the swordsman faced by three sword-wielding opponents, one to thrust, one to cut, and one to throw the sword. The cover is the same for each:

*"... Io acresco lo pe che denanci un pocho for a de strada e con lo stancho io passo ala traversa. E in quello passare mi crosso rebattando le spade ue trovo discoverti e de ferire mi faro certi. E si lanza o spada me ven alanzada, tutte le rebatto chome io ditto passando fuora di strada. Secondo che vedretti li miei zochi qui dreto."*

I step the front foot a little off the line, and with the left I pass on the traverse. And in this pass I cross the sword with a strike (rebatando), and I find him uncovered and strike him for certain. And if a lance or a sword is thrown at me, I batter all of them aside as I said, passing off the line. Secondly I do the plays that follow me.

There follow eleven scholars, each of which begins with the same core action from the starting guard (this guard is unnamed, but comparison with the rest of the sword sections suggests it is likely to be a version of *coda longa*. The position is similar to *dente de cenghiaro* with the dagger, but that name belongs to a totally different position with the sword. *Coda longa* is shown only on the right side with the sword in two hands and with the pollax, but in the mounted combat section, *coda longa* is shown on the left side of the body).

The treatise continues with the sword held in two hands. After a preliminary paragraph detailing the footwork terminology and some advice about matching your position to your opponent's (discussed below), Fiore shows us two versions of the same guard (*posta di donna*). He then continues with six guards, the first four of

which are unnamed. These four show (among other things) the variant grips of the sword: held by the crossguard to throw; held in one hand; held with the pommel in the right hand and the left on the blade for longer thrusts; and held at half sword (right hand on the grip, left hand on the blade). *Posta di donna* is then repeated, twice; the second time with a boar-hunting sword held by the blade, like (as the text states) an axe.

The seven blows (*colpi*) are then shown, in four clear illustrations. The edge blows are named *fendente* (descending, literally 'striking'), *sottano* (ascending, literally 'ascending') and *mezano* (horizontal, literally 'middle'), and classified as *mandritto* (forehand) and *roverso* (backhand). The thrusts are only depicted as one blow up the middle, but the text expands on them:

*Noy semo le punte crudele e mortale. E lo nostro camino sie por mezo lo corpo cominzando alo petenichio in fin ala fronte. E semo punte d. V. rasone; zoe doy soprane una duna parte latra de laltra. E doy de sotta simile mente una duna parte e laltra delaltra. E una di mezo che esse di meza porta di ferro o vero di posta longa coreme.*

We are the thrusts cruel and mortal. And our way is to the middle of the body, starting at the groin and ending at the forehead. And we thrusts are of 5 types; thus two high (ones) one from one side and the other from the other. And two from below similarly one from one side and the other from the other. And one in the middle that comes from *meza porta di ferro* or else from *posta longa* we go.

So there are really six edge blows and five thrusts. Incidentally, Fiore does use the word *taglio*, cut, on occasion (such as on page 44 verso); it suggests to me that *colpi* (blows) is a deliberate choice, indicating a striking action rather than a slicing one, as the primary way of striking with the edge.

There follows a further twelve guards of the longsword in two hands. These are the amplifier for the original four; adding the sword simply adds a further layer of complexity. So, where in the unarmed section any position with the hands low is *porta di ferro*, with the sword we get *porta di ferro mezana*, *tutta porta di ferro*, *posta di dente zenghiaro*, *posta di dente zenghiaro la mezana*, *posta breve* and *coda longa*, all of which have the hands low. He has already stated that all guards can do a *volta stabile* and a *meza volta*; we see this in for example the *zenghiaro* guards, *tutta* and *meza*, stand in one, do a *volta stabile*, and you have the other. Also, of the twelve, *donna* is also shown on each side, which is implied by the *meza volta* (where “with a pass backwards or forwards you can play on the other side in front or behind”). So, there is one guard shown with the *volta stabile* applied, and one with the *meza volta*. The core positions are therefore only nine in number (*porta di ferro*, *posta di donna*, *posta di fenestra*, *posta longa*, *posta breve*, *dente de cenghiaro*, *coda longa*, *bichorno*, and *frontale*) all others being variations on them. That he chooses to show twelve is unsurprising given the cultural predisposition current at the time (and still today) to use twelve as an organisational number (months, hours, apostles, days of Christmas).

The plays of the longsword in two hands unarmoured are then divided into two sections; *zogho largo* and *zogho stretto* (wide play and close play). Each section begins with a crossing of the sword (presumably a parry, though either the attacker or defender can usually perform the play that follows- where that is not the case Fiore states the nature of the attack which player executes the play shown). The primary difference seems to be that the crossing at *zogho largo* is to the outside of the lead leg, and that of the *zogho stretto* is to the inside of the lead leg. Given that the usual continuation is a pass, it makes sense that the crossing outside the lead leg leads into a wider play, as there is space to pass forwards without coming to grips. Having crossed to the inside of the lead leg, passing forwards automatically brings you into contact with the opponent's arms.

The first remedy master of *zogho largo* is crossed at the tips of the swords, and is followed by only one play. The second remedy master is crossed at the middle of the swords and is followed by a generous 17 scholars, the last of which is a counter-remedy master. There is only one remedy master of *zogho stretto*, who is followed by 22 scholars, of which two are counter-remedy masters (scholars 14 and 15, both counters to the wrap (play 13, also the second play of the first remedy master of dagger).

There follows a similar situation to the beginning of the sword in one hand section; one remedy master standing in *posta di dente zenghiaro* (the text states that he could also be in *posta di donna* on the left or *fenestra* on the left) faced with three attackers, which summarises the process of covering and striking from a guard held on the left; given that the previous three remedy masters are shown left foot forwards, implying perhaps that they are starting in such a guard (this is actually stated in the play of the *colpo villano*), this seems to suggest that everything that has gone before might be done (with some adjustment) again from this side. Fiore actually states, at the end of the *zogho largo* section on page 27 verso:

*Qui finisce zogho largo de la spada a doy mani che sono zoghi uniti gli quali anò zoghi, zoe rimedi e contrari da parte dritta e de parte riversa e contrapunte e contratagli de zaschuna rasone cum roture coverte, ferire e ligadure che tutte queste chose lizerissimamente se ponno intendere.*

Here ends the *zogho largo* of the sword in two hands, that are plays united with all the other plays, thus remedies and counters from the right and left sides, and counterthrusts and countercuts of each and every type, with breakings, covers, strikes and binds, so that all these things may be very easily understood.

This clearly states that the *zogho largo* plays are one with the rest of the treatise, and (though they may not be shown) should be applicable against all attacks, with covers, remedies and counters from both sides. This is the clearest instruction in the whole treatise that we are meant to go beyond what is shown; to discover the principle behind the play and apply it as appropriate.

After the *zogho stretto* section there follows an unusual little section of a crowned master with a stick and a dagger, facing two lancers (representing high and low thrusts), and followed by said master defending against the thrust and stabbing the attacker in the chest. The attackers' counters are mentioned but not shown. Then a second crowned master with two branches and a dagger, who throws one branch at his attacker's head, parries with the other, and steps in to strike with the dagger. It may be that this section is simply the conclusion of the unarmoured combat part of the treatise (while the lance and mounted combat sections are depicted (mostly) with unarmoured combatants, it was the norm in this period for such engagements to be conducted in armour, and one play of the lance on horseback actually refers to the unusual circumstance of the player being unarmoured, page 42 recto), demonstrating the basic principles of the system we have seen thus far: step off the line while covering yourself from the attack, close in to strike; counter by turning your weapon forward, closing the line of the incoming strike, and hit with the other end.

This makes sense given what comes next: a single page depicting the four virtues a swordsman must have (*avvisamento* (foresight, judgement of distance and time), *audatia* (boldness), *forteza* (strength), and *celeritas* (swiftness)), each personified by an animal, surrounding a standing master who illustrates the seven blows of the sword. Mr. Charron has ably demonstrated that this is in the tradition of medieval memory devices, namely a version of the map of the heavens.<sup>1</sup> The twelve gilded parts of the design (the hilts of the seven swords, the collars on the four representative animals, and the crown over the master's head) are all mnemonic loci for the various parts of the system. It is up to the reader to locate the elements of the system they wish to remember on the design as they see fit. Some correlations are obvious (twelve gilded parts, twelve longsword guards; four unarmed *poste*, four animals, etc.), the rest is entirely subjective.

This is followed by the six guards of the sword in armour. Only one of these is the same as in the twelve main guards previously depicted (*porta di ferro mezana*), and one has appeared before in the six unnamed guards of the longsword (*posta di crose bastarda*). With the exception of *porta di ferro*, all are held with the left hand on the blade, and as with the sword in one hand section, only one cover is shown (the first and only remedy master in this section). He is followed by 15 scholars, the penultimate of which is a counter-remedy. The section concludes with two annotated illustrations of special swords for combat in armour; one with a sliding rondel on the blade and five wicked spikes on the pommel; the other with a blade blunted for most of its length and an indented section near the tip for the left hand.

Armoured combat continues with the pollaxe, for which another six guards are shown, *posta breve serpentina*, *posta di vera crose*, *posta di donna*, *posta di dente zengiaro*, *coda longa*, and *posta di fenestra la sinistra*. *Zengiaro* is particularly interesting as it appears to be mistakenly named as *porta di ferro mezana*. The text begins "*Si posta di donna a mi porta di ferro mezana e contraria*" (If *posta di donna*, to me *porta di ferro mezana* is a counter...)(page 35 verso) which suggests that this picture is of *porta di ferro mezana*. However, it continues to describe what would

<sup>1</sup> An excellent example of a similar geometric pattern being used to store information may be found in Carruthers, fig 16 (between pages 220 and 221), Hugo de Folieto's picture of the chief themes of "Concerning the Dove and the Hawk"

happen with a sword in hand. The text above the preceding picture, of *posta di donna*, reads "*Posta di donna son contra dente zengiario, quello mi aspetta uno grande colpo gli voglio fare*" (*Posta di donna* I am against *dente zengiario*, who expects from me a great blow that I want to make). This suggests that the position opposite is *dente zengiario*. Given that this position is closer to *zengiario* with the sword and with the lance, than it is to *mezana porta di ferro* with either weapon, I choose to follow the text of the preceding illustration when naming this guard. Hence, it is *dente di zengiario*, not *porta di ferro mezana*. Cross-reference with the Pisani Dossi manuscript confirms this; the same guard, in the same place, is called *dente de zengiario*.

The pollax section includes only eight plays, and is unique in that it has no remedy master to begin it. It concludes with a further two plays, each with a crowned master, and showing special cases of axe use; the first with an axe that has a weight tied to the end with a rope, which has been wrapped around the companion's feet; the second has a box filled with poison dust that is cast in the companion's face (the recipe is included, along with a touching address to Fiore's patron: *Signore nobilissimo Signor mio Marchese, assay chose sono in questo libro che noy tale malizie non le fareste. Ma por piu sapere, piazza mi di vederle.* (Signor, most noble signor, my Marchese, there are things in this book that are of such malice that you would not do them. But for more knowledge, please look at them.))

The final section of foot combat covers the *lanza*, a lance or spear. Fiore has previously distinguished some guards as held on the left or the right (see for instance page , but for the first and only time he here separates all the guards of a given weapon into left and right sides, three on the right (*tutta porta di ferro*, *porta di ferro mezana*, and *posta di fenestra*) and three on the left (*dente zengiario*, *posta di vera crose*, and *posta di fenestra*). The three guards held on the right are followed by one remedy master and one counter-remedy master; then come the three *roverso* guards, followed by just one play. At this point Fiore remarks that "*Lo zogho dela lanza qui finisce che io lo fazo d'la parte riversa delor zoghi me impazo*" (the play of the lance that finishes here that I do from the left side, of these plays I am mad). The picture of *tutta porta di ferro* has unfortunately lost the head of the lance, so we cannot see which way up the lance should be held; the play that follows it is most consistent with the system if the point is up, and cross-reference with the Pisani-Dossi and the Morgan confirms this, as the head is clearly visible in both manuscripts.

The plays of the lance hold no real surprises; when attacked, step off the line, pass on the traverse while covering in the shortest line, and strike. The counter-remedy is simply to pass forwards and strike with the other end when the remedy master covers.

This concludes the art of combat on foot; there follows twelve sides of mounted combat. The structure of the individual pages changes here; when presenting a guard, the master is always opposed by an attacker on horseback, the pair taking up half of a side. This is probably to maintain scale; mounted combat begins at a much greater range than foot combat, and until the players are at very close range, there is no space for more than two plays per side. This attention to scale suggests that the distances between guards shown opposed to each other, and in the plays themselves, is probably fairly accurate throughout the treatise.

The arrangement of this part of the treatise is particularly interesting, so I will describe it in some detail. To begin with, *all* defensive guards on horseback are shown on the left side; this is presumably because the horse's head would get in the way if, as a right-hander, we beat the attacker's weapon to the left from the right side. We begin with *posta di dente cenghiaro* with the lance, against a fellow lancer; this is immediately followed by its counter-remedy (though the remedy was described, not shown). This is followed by two plays of *posta di donna* with the lance, again with the covers described, not shown. The final play of lance against lance shows a defence for an unarmoured man facing way from his opponent with the lance pointing backwards over his shoulder, against an armoured opponent. In the same vein as the play of *dente cenghiaro* that ends the section of the sword in two hands unarmoured, alternate starting guards are mentioned in the text (*dente zenghiaro* and *posta di donna la sinistra*).

As if we were now working backwards through the manuscript, this section continues with the sword against the lance, sword against sword, and finally *abrazare* on horseback. The first swordsman is in *posta di donna*, facing the lance (and the text mentions that “*questa guardia sie bona contra tutte altre arme manuale/ zoe contra Aza, Bastone/ spada, etcetera*” (this guard is good against all other manual weapons, thus axe, staff, sword etcetera). He is followed by two counter-remedy masters, the latter being unique in that the counter is executed before the combatants are in range; he “*metti e resta sua lanza sotto lo suo brazo stanco por che non gli sia rebattuda sua lanza*” (places and rests his lance under his left arm because that way his lance cannot be beaten aside).

*Dente di cenghiaro* makes another appearance here against the lance, and is countered in the next play by a most unchivalrous (to our eyes) thrust to the eye of the swordsman's horse; a lesson on the advantage of distance: with a longer weapon you can strike before the swordsman is in range to cover.

The next master holds his sword in *coda longa*, opposing a companion who threatens with the point; here Fiore specifies how the combatants pass each other: *Questo portar di spada se chiama posta di coda longa, e sie molto bona contra lanza e contra ogni arma manuale cavalcando de la parte dritta dello suo inmigho*” (this holding of the sword is called the position of the long tail, and it is very good against the lance and against all manual weapons, riding on the right side of your enemy). The subsequent pictures clarify that you are riding with your right side to his; as we would think of it, you ride to the left of your opponent.

The next master is in *coda longa*, against a rider who appears to be in *fenestra* on the right (Fiore at no point shows a master of a student on horseback with a right-side guard; perhaps due to space considerations, but more likely here I think because blows from a right-hander in a right-side guard naturally end in the horse's head. Also if by convention one always passes to the left of your opponent's horse, it makes more sense to have your weapon over on the left to give yourself room to swing it to the right). Most importantly, here Fiore admonishes that: *E tente ben a mente che le punte e li colpi riversi si debano rebatter in fora, zoè, ala traversa e non in erto* (And keep it well in mind that the thrusts and blows from the *riverso* side (i.e. backhand) must be beaten away, thus to the traverse, and not up). This sentence is should also be

borne in mind when interpreting the crucial terms "*re batter*" and "*ala traversa*" which occur so often in the rest of the treatise.

The next master is also in *coda longa*, this time opposed by a man on *posta di donna* on the left. Nine scholars follow (numbered by the author), of which eight and nine are particularly relevant to the structure of the text. The text of the eighth play begins: *Questo si è lo ottavo zogho ch'è contrario di tutti gli zoghi che mi sono denanci, e maximamente delli zoghi de spada a cavallo e delli lor magistri che sono in guardia d'coda longa* (This is the eighth play that is a counter to all the plays that are before me, and especially of the plays of the sword on horseback and of the masters that are in the guard of *coda longa*). This counter, which is done by entering with the pommel after your initial blow is beaten aside by the master, is clearly stated to be a counter to all previous plays, and indeed is mechanically identical to the counter of the lance. Suddenly we have a transition from the *zogho largo* to the *zogho stretto*, mapped out for us.

The ninth play is the counter to the eighth, and is one of the rare counter-counter-remedy masters. Given the crucial importance of the previous play, this technique is naturally the proper response to almost all counters in the book so far. It includes most of what we saw in the *zogho stretto* section: against the previous master's pommel strike Fiore has us cover, and then disarm, cut or pommel strike in return.

With no further crowned masters, Fiore then shows us seven plays of wrestling on horseback, with counters in the second and fourth plays. The distance between the players, which had been increasing steadily since the *abrazare* section until the maximum, that of the mounted lance, has finally closed again. This is I think one of the primary organisational principles of this treatise. the most ostentatious of the knightly feats of arms, the joust, occurs at the maximum range; the most humble, at the closest (wrestling). There would have been an equal logic to putting wrestling on horseback first in the mounted section, but by expanding and contracting the distance, the system appears to come full circle. this is supported by the next section, that of the man on foot against the mounted lancers; again we see three antagonists and one defender, followed by two plays; one in which the defender covers and strikes with the tip of his *ghiaverina* (a type of spear), the other when he strikes with the butt after his cover. This perhaps echoes the *zogho largo/zogho stretto* distinction.

The last play of mounted combat then shows a special case (much like at the end of the pollax section); the crowned master has tied a rope to the foot of his lance, to enable him to drag the enemy off his horse. The last illustration has an interesting little story attached; the text reads:

*Questo Ribaldo mi fuziva a una forteza, tanto corsi che io lo zunsi apresso la fortezza sempre corando a tutta brena. E di mia spada lo ferì sotto la lasena, lì che malesi pò l'omo armare. E per paura de' soy amisi voglio retornare.*

This ribald fled from me to a fortress, so long I ran that I caught him near the fortress, always running at full rein. And with my sword I struck him under the armpit, where it is hard for the man to armour. And for fear of his friends I wish to return. (46 verso)

This is not really a play, in that chasing a ribald and hitting him under the arm then running away from his friends does not constitute a technique as such. While Fiore might be pointing out a weakness in the armour, the main function of this illustration is probably to remind the reader to place all the art in his memory-castle.

The book ends with two horses tethered to a tree; the tree is another memory device for remembering the art: that one horse is armoured and the other is not reminds the reader that the art contains both armoured and unarmoured techniques.

## ***2. Connecting the sections together***

The way Fiore segues from one section to another is particularly interesting. The last four plays of wrestling show firstly two plays using a short stick to grapple an unarmed opponent; then the same stick used in defence against a dagger, the defender seated on a bench. This leads us into the uses and defences against the dagger. The dagger section begins with five variations of *porta di ferro*, the basic ready position with this weapon. There follows the dagger 'segno' page, where the four blows of the dagger are defined. Then four masters, each holding a symbol of their particular skill. the first holds a dagger, in addition to the one at his belt: he represents the concept of disarms. The second holds two severed arms, and represents the concept of breaking and dislocating limbs. the third hold two keys, and represents opening and locking the arms of his opponents: hence locks and counterlocks (as I see it, the difference between a lock and a break is a matter of targeting, more than technique: a grip that is used to immediately destroy the arm is a 'break'; a grip that holds your man still while you stab him is a 'lock'. I don't think Fiore uses locks for submission purposes). The fourth has a palm frond, the mark of a victor; his opponent is lying apparently dead under his feet, and he represents the concept of taking your opponent down (hence, takedowns, though in this art they are potentially lethal. The idea seems to be to use the ground as a giant anvil to hammer your opponent's head onto). The dagger section begins with unarmed defences against the dagger, develops into dagger against dagger, and finishes with dagger defence against a sword attack. This is followed by sword defence against a dagger (a suicidal daggerman, it seems, though the sword is in its scabbard at the moment of the assault).

The natural continuation here is to sword against sword, and that's exactly what we get, with the plays of the sword held in one hand. The size of the sword varies: in all the illustrations in this section it is clearly a longsword, with ample extra length in the grip to add the left hand. <sup>1</sup>The question of why the sword would be held in one hand is not addressed: the set-up (awaiting the attack) allows ample time to get the other hand on the grip after the draw. My guess is that this sequence of plays fits best directly after the dagger section: the techniques segue neatly, the cover with the sword is very similar to the previous cover using the dagger against a fendente (see below

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1 In one image (two sections further on, in the plays of the *zogho stretto* with the sword in two hands, page 29 recto, top left) the sword is apparently shorter, and the style of the drawing changes to the point where I suspect a different artist is at work. I think the point is that by this period most knights in Fiore's ambit would use a longsword; but the art can be adapted to any sword-type of the period.

for details), and the cover that precedes them (a beat from the left) is best done from this guard, and this guard cannot be held comfortably with two hands on the grip, neither can the beat be most effectively done with a two-handed grip. Using one hand on the sword also automatically frees the left hand for grappling, which occupies 10 out of the 11 plays shown. It also prepares the swordsman for using the sword in one hand on horseback.

The section of the sword in one hand leads directly into the section of the sword in two hands. This latter is further divided into the plays of *zogho largo* (wide, long, or loose play), and *zogho stretto* (tight, narrow, or close play). A simple observation of the images suggests that *zogho largo* is broadly similar to play at long range, and *zogho stretto* to play at close quarters. The last two plays of *zogho largo* lead naturally into those of *zogho stretto*. The first paragraph reads:

*Questo zogho si chiama punta falsa o punta curta, e si diro come la fazzo. Io mostro e venire cum grande forza por ferire lo zugadore cum colpe mezano in la testa. E subito chello fa la coverta io fiero la sua spada lizeramente. E subito volto la spada mia de l'altra parte piglando la mia spada cum la mane mia mancha quasi al mezo. E la punta gli metto subita in la gola o in lo petto. Ede miglore questo zogo in arme che senza.*

This play is called the false thrust or the short thrust, and I will tell you how to do it. I show as if to come with great force to strike the player with a horizontal strike in the head. And immediately that he makes the cover I strike his blade lightly. And immediately turn my sword to the other side grasping it with my left hand about in the middle. And the thrust I place immediately in the throat or in the chest. And this play is better in armour than without.

The counter:

*Questo sielo contrario del zogho che me denanci, zoe de punta falsa overo di punta curta. E questo contrario si fa por tal modo. Quando lo scolaro fieri in la mia spada, in la volta chello da a la sua spada subito io do volta a la mia por quello nion?? che lui da volta a la sua. Salvo che io passo ala traversa por trovar lo compagno piu scoperto. E si gli metto la punta in lo volto. E questo contrario ebono in arme e senza.*

This is the counter of the play that comes before me, thus the false thrust or the short thrust. And this counter is done in this way. When the scholar strikes my sword, in the turn that he makes to his sword, I immediately make a turn with mine in the moment that he makes the turn to his. Only that I pass on the traverse to find the companion more uncovered. And so I place the thrust in his face. And this counter is good in armour and without.

What is particularly interesting about this sequence, other than its natural progression from long range (the first *mezano*) to close quarters (stepping in with the thrust itself, at half sword), is the apparent break from the usual convention of the figure executing the first defence against an attack being the remedy master. In this case, the scholar of the previous remedy master is clearly identified as the attacker, who goes from the *incrosada* created by the companion's defence into the play in question. Given the way the convention is applied in the rest of the treatise, the scholar 'ought' to be a counter-remedy master. However, nowhere does it state that the remedy masters at the *incrosadas* on pages 27 recto and 30 recto are attacking or defending. Clearly, given the instructions accompanying the guards (which describe how to defend against various attacks with a cover followed by a thrust or cut), it is reasonable to suppose that the *incrosadas* are parries; however, as the existence of the counter-remedy masters of the dagger and lance sections makes clear, there is nothing to prevent the attacker taking the moment of the parry to step in and strike on the other side. So we can glean the idea that the master of the crossing is he who exploits it best, not necessarily the attacker or the defender. The counter-remedy presented here is a miracle of simplicity; merely a step out of the way while stabbing the opponent with the shortest possible line.

Once at close quarters, the plays are elegant applications of everything previously learned in the wrestling, dagger, and sword in one hand sections. It finishes with a recap of what to do against cut thrust or thrown sword, from three guards held on the left: *dente de cenghiaro*, *posta di donna*, and *posta di fenestra* (step off the line, beat aside the weapon while passing on the traverse, and then strike). Then in an apparent non sequitur, we find a master holding a staff and a dagger attacked by a lancer, his scholar stabbing the attacker, then a similar play with a master holding a branch in each hand with a dagger in his belt, threatened also by a lancer, who gets a stick thrown at his head, then stabbed while the cover is made by the other branch. (The lancer's counter is described but not shown.)

This basically finishes the unarmoured portion of the treatise, which is marked by the memorial *segno*, after which we have the guards of the sword in armour. This section almost exclusively deals with the sword held by grip and blade; we saw this before in the six unnamed guards of the sword, and again in the play of the *punta falsa* (which you will recall Fiore determines is "better in armour than without"). This is also the end of Fiore's use of segue sections; from here on each section begins with the relevant guards, ends with the last play of that weapon, and then the next set of guards is shown.

### ***Defining some terms***

### **Stepping and turning**

When studying any historical fencing source, a precise understanding of the technical terms used is a vital prerequisite to making a physical interpretation of the art it represents. Perhaps the single most important passage in the entire treatise from the point of view of defining Fiore's terms comes on page 22 recto. This is the only description of footwork that Fiore gives us, in the paragraph that begins the section of

the longsword held in two hands. It is worth translating the text here in full, as it defines the terms upon which any practical interpretation must be based. It is also the only time in which Fiore actually explains any of the terms he uses.

*Noy sono doi guardie una si fatta che l'altra, e una e contraria de l'altra e zaschuna altra guardia in larte una simile de l'altra sie contrario salvo le guardie che stano in punta, zoe posta lunga e breve e meza porta di ferro che punta por punta la piu lunga fa offesa inanci. E zo che po fare una po far l'altra. E zaschuna guardia po fare volta stabile e meza volta. Volta stabile che stando fermo po zugar denanci e di dredo de una parte. Meza volta si e quando uno fa un passo o inanzi o indredo, e chossi po zugare de l'altra parte denanzi e di dredo. Tutta volta sie quando uno va intorno uno pe cum laltro pe, luno staga fermo e laltro lo circundi. E perzo digo che la spada si ha tre movimenti, zoe volta stabile, meza volta, e tutta volta. E queste guardie sono chiamata luna e l'altra posta di donna. Anchora sono iy cose in larte, zoe passare, tornare, acressere e discesse.*

We are two guards one so made like the other, and one is the counter to the other. And each of the other guards in the art, one similar to the other is the counter, except for the guards that stand in the point: thus *posta longa* (long position), and *breve* (short) and *meza porta di ferro* (middle iron gate) because point against point the longer makes offense first. And what one can do the other can do. And each guard can do *volta stabile* (stable turn) and *meza volta* (half turn). *Volta stabile* is when standing firm, one can play in front and behind on one side. *Meza volta* is when one makes a pass forwards or backwards, and so can play on the other side in front and behind. *Tutta volta* (whole turn) is when one goes turning one foot around the other foot, one stays firm, and the other circles around it. And therefore I say the sword has three movements, thus: *volta stabile*, *meza volta* and *tutta volta*. And these guards are called one and the other *posta di donna* (woman position). Also there are 4 things in the art, thus: *passare* (pass), *tornare* (return), *acressere* (increase, i.e. step forward) and *discesse* (decrease, i.e. step backwards).

When I began studying Fiore's work, I started with the Pisani Dossi manuscript, which doesn't discuss footwork at all. I saw from the pictures that the swordsman's weight is sometimes forwards, on the front leg, and sometimes to the rear, and that the action was not precisely linear: the feet turn. So I worked out 'the shift between forward position and rear position', and only years later learned (from Bob Charron) that this is the *volta stabile*. You can see it from the two versions of *posta di donna* shown immediately after this excerpt: in each case the sword is on the right shoulder, so the only change is in the legs (the feet have not left the ground, hence the "stable turn"). Note that in the illustration the point of view has also moved, from the right to the left side. The pass is also clearly visible in many plays throughout the book, and needs no real discussion. Likewise, '*tornare*', to pass backwards, is stated and shown in several places. (For a more detailed examination of the terms *meza volta* and *tutta volta*, please refer to my essay "Translation Issues" available at <http://www.salvatorfabris.com/Articles.shtml>)

It is relatively easy to see gross movements in the illustrations, like the shift of the weight to one leg or the other, or the pass (which places the other leg in front).

*Accressere* and *discressere* are a tad more elusive. It is clear from the frequent statements along the lines of "*Io accresco lo pe' ch'è denanci un pocho fora di strada e cum lo stancho io passo ala traversa*" ("I increase the foot that is in front a little out of the way and with the left I pass on the traverse") (page 20 recto) that it is an action that moves one foot, that is neither a pass nor a turn. The term literally means "to increase", and it is generally accepted that it is a movement of one foot, without passing, in the general direction of the opponent (i.e. forwards). The *discressere* ("to decrease") is by inference a step back without passing.

The "*strada*" is a vital and frequently used term that Fiore fails to define: it literally means "way" as in "highway" (the modern Italian "autostrada" means motorway or freeway). In the context in which it occurs it clearly refers to the direct line of approach between two swordsmen, or in the case of an oblique attack, the line of approach of the weapon. It is therefore usually rendered as "line", in reference to classical and modern fencing terminology. It usually appears in the context of *fora di strada*, which is commonly rendered as "off the line". It is also correct in my view to apply a more general interpretation such as "out of the way".

*Ala traversa* is a bit more tricky, as it occurs in three main contexts: with the *passare*, as in *passo ala traversa* (page 20 recto et.al.); with reference to the opponent's sword, as in *E per modo che fieri lo zengiaro a la traversa de la spada del compagno* (page 24 verso); and describing the direction in which to beat said sword, as in *E tente ben a mente che le punte e li colpi riversi si debano rebatter in fora, zoè, ala traversa e non in erto* (page 43 verso). In the first case, reference to the accompanying illustrations suggests that the equivalent English expression "pass on the traverse" or simply "traverse" common in English fencing manuals will serve as a translation. (Note though that some manuals use the term to describe a sideways or diagonal step without passing, e.g. Roworth, pp 41-43.) There is no illustration accompanying the description "*ala traversa de la spada*", but in the few cases that Fiore does show the contact between the swords (the crossing, or *incrosada*, seen on pages 25 recto and verso, and 28 recto), they meet at an angle close to ninety degrees; it is not unreasonable to suppose that some version of George Silver's "true cross" is required (usually interpreted as a ninety-degree crossing of the swords during a parry). So *ala traversa* here suggests crossing the incoming blade with your own at safe angle. This makes sense when executing the plays, and also linguistically, as to traverse something is usually understood to mean to cross it directly. As a further example, the play of the *scambiar di punta*, shown on page 26 verso includes the text "*traversando la sua spada*" ("crossing his sword"), which the illustration shows as crossing the attacker's sword with your own. In the last instance, *ala traversa* is likened to *in fora*, and compared negatively to *in erto*. *In fora* means here "away" or "to the outside", so *ala traversa* is perhaps best rendered here as "to the side". *In erto* means "upwards". The sentence may therefore be translated as: "And keep well in mind that the thrusts and the backhand blows must be beaten away to the outside, hence to the side, and not upwards".

Putting this all together, it seems that to pass *ala traversa* is to pass diagonally forwards or to the side (i.e. on the traverse, and specifically not straight forwards); meeting a sword *ala traversa* is to do so being sure to make a proper crossing of near

to ninety degrees; and to beat aside a weapon *ala traversa* is to beat it to the side as opposed to upwards.

The *incrosada* is simply the crossing of the swords (as Fiore writes for example on page 28 recto: "*Noi stasemo qui incrosadi e di questo incrosar che noi faremo tutti gli zoghi...*" ("We stand here crossed and from this crossing we make all the plays...")). It is subject to further qualification regarding where on the blade the cross occurs, thus at *tuta spada* ("whole sword", shown only in the Morgan, and clearly crossing near the hilts), *meza spada* ("half sword", crossed in the middle of the blades) and *punta*, (point) crossed about a quarter of the way down from the point. This is discussed further in my "Translation Issues".

Remedy is one of the most important terms in the system as it denotes every single defence. The remedies are simply answers to a problem; in the case of this art, the problem is someone trying to kill you. As Fiore puts it in the text describing the first remedy master of dagger, "*Io so primo magistro e chiamato remedio, por che rimedio tanto e a dire che sapere remediare che non ti sia dado, e che possi dare e ferire lo tuo contrario inmigho*" (I am the first master and called remedy, because to remedy is as much as to say to know to remedy that you are not struck, and that you can give and strike your counter to the enemy.). An example of a remedy is a "*coverta*": this term is used frequently in this treatise to describe a defensive action, such as a parry. It is not, however, restricted to sword actions; any action that intercepts an incoming attack seems to be termed a "*coverta*". An example may be found in the fifth play of the first master of dagger, for example: "*In bona choverta por forti la daga di mano*" (In a good cover to take the dagger from the hand). Compare that to the text for the guard *fenestra* with the sword: "*E de covreir e de ferire ella e magistra*" (And to cover and to strike she is master). The distinction between the remedy, which includes the counter, and the cover which is just the defensive portion of the remedy, is implied when Fiore states *E quelle de la parte dritta covramo a cum coverta passa e metteno punta.*" (And these (guards) of the right side cover, and with the cover pass and place the point). (page 39 recto).

## Some Key Plays

When approaching a treatise of such vast scope it often helps to remember that however sophisticated it may be, the art it contains is probably fundamentally simple, as it has to work under extreme pressure. It is possible to interpret the vast array of techniques shown as variations on a few basic actions, adapted to specific circumstances. Of course, a high level practitioner is able to make decisions and calculate tactical advantage, subtly modifying technique on the fly to more perfectly control the fight. However, there is ample evidence to show that the Fiore himself (or at least, whoever compiled this version of his work) took pains to remind his readers of the underlying consistency and simplicity of the system.

Let us briefly look at the three occasions where a swordsman or lancer is faced with three opponents offering different attacks (cut, thrust or thrown weapon).

Firstly, on page 20 Recto. The text under the attackers reads:

*Noy semo tre zugadori che volemo alcider questo magistro. Uno gli dè trare di punta, laltro di taglio laltro vole fatt lanzare la sua spada contra lo ditto magistro. Si che ben sarà grande fatto ch'ello non sia morto, che dio lo faza ben tristo.*

We are three players who want to attack this master. One of them will strike with the point, the other cut, and the other wants to throw his sword at the said master. So that it will certainly be a great thing if he does not die, that God has made so sad.

The text under the master reads:

*Voyseti cativi e di quest'arte savete pocho. Fate gli che parole non ano loco. Vegnaa uno a uno chi sa fare e po' che se voi fossi cento tutti vi guasterò per questa guardia ch'è chossi bona e forte. Io acresco lo pe' ch'è denanci un pocho fora de strada e cum lo stanco io passo ala traversa. E in quello passare incroso rebattendo le spade ve trovo descuberti e de ferire vi farò certi. E si lanza o spada me ven alanzada, tutte le rebatto chome t'ò ditto passando fuora di strada secondo che vedreti li miei zochi qui dreto, de guardagli che v'in prego. e pur cum spada a una mano farò mia arte como n'è dereto in queste carte.*

You are filthy bad fellows (*cativi*)<sup>1</sup> and of this art you know little. Act, for words have no place here. Come one by one who knows how to do it, and even if you were a hundred, I will ruin all of you by this guard that I chose, good and strong. I step the front foot a little off the line, and with the left I pass on the traverse. And in this pass I cross the sword with a strike (*rebattando*), and I find him uncovered and strike him for certain. And if a lance or a sword is thrown at me, I batter all of them aside as I said, passing off the line. Secondly I do the plays that follow me. With this guard that I take for the guard in one hand, I make my art, as you see in the following pages.

At the end of the sword out of armour section we have a similar set-up, this time with the master in *dente de zenghiaro*.

The text under the attackers reads:

*Questi sono tre compagni che volemo alader questo magistro che aspetta con la spada a doy mane. Lo primo di questi tre vole lanzare la sua spada contra lo magistro. Lo secondo vole ferire lo detto magistrao d'taglio o de punta. Lo terzo vole lanzare doy lanze chello a parechiad, come qui depento.*

These are three companions who want to strike this master, who waits for them with a sword in two hands. The first of these three wants to throw his sword at the master. The second wants to strike the said master with a cut or a thrust. The third wants to throw two lances that he has made ready as is shown here.

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<sup>1</sup> Florio translates *cattivaccio* as "a filthy bad fellow" and it is the closest cognate to *cativi* I can find. It seems to fit here.

And that under the master:

*Io spetto questi tre in tal posta, zoe in dente di zengiaro. E in altre guardie poria spettare, zoe in posta de donna la senestra. Anchora in posta di fenestra sinistra cum quello modo e deffesa che faro in dente di zenghiaro. Talmodo e tal deffesa le ditte guardie debian fare. Senza paura io spetto uno a uno e non posso fallire. Ne taglio ne punte ne arme manuale che mi sia lanzada. Lo pe dritto chio denanci acreso for a de strada, E cum lo pe stancho passo ala traversa del arma che me incontra rebatendola in part riversa. E por questo modo fazo mia deffesa. Fatta la coverta subito faro loffesa..*

I await these three in this guard, thus: in the boar's tooth. And in other guards I could wait, thus: in the woman's guard on the left; also in the window guard on the left. In this way he who is in the boar's tooth defends himself. This way and this defence the said guards must do. Without fear I await them one by one; and i cannot fail. Neither cut nor thrust, nor any hand weapon that is thrown at me. The right foot that is in front I increase out of the line; and with the left foot I pass on the traverse of the weapon that comes towards me, striking it to the reverse part. And in this way I make my defence. Making the cover I immediately make the offense. (31 recto)

Finally, at the end of the mounted combat section we again see a master in *dente de cenghiaro*, this time with a type of spear called a ghiavarina. The accompanying text under the attackers reads:

*Qui sono tre compagni che volemo alcider questo magistro. Loprimo lo vole ferir sotto man che porta sua lanza a meza lanza. Laltro porta sua lanza restada a tutta lanza. Lo tero lo vole alanzare cum sua lanza. E sie de patto che ruffino non debia fare pui dun colpo per homo. Anchora debano fare a uno a uno.*

Here are three companions who wish to hurt this master. The first wishes to strike underhand that carries his lance by the middle ("a meza lanza"). The other carries his lance resting at "tutta lanza" (by the butt end). The third wants to throw his lance. And it is agreed that the ruffians will make no more than one blow each, and they must act one by one.

And that under the master reads:

*Vegna a uno a uno chi vol venire, che por nessuno di qui non mi son por partire. Anche in dente di cenghiaro son presto por aspettare. Quando la lanza contra me ? vignura? portada o vero de mane zitada subito io schuio?? la strada zoe che io acresco lo pe dritto for a de strada e cum lo stancho passo ala traversa rebattendo la lanza che mi vene por ferire. Si che di mille una non poria fallure. Questo chio fazzo cum la ghiaverina cum lo bastone e cum spada lo faria. Ella deffesa chio fazo contra le lanze, contra spada e contra bastone quello farie li mia zoghi che sono dreto.*

Come one by one who wishes to come, for none of them will I leave. So, in dente di cenghiaro I am ready to wait. When the lance against me comes, carried or thrown from the hand, I quickly void from the line. Thus, I step the right foot forward off the line and with the left pass on the traverse beating the lance that comes towards me to strike. Out of a thousand, not even one will fail. This I do with the ghiavarina, with a stick, and with a sword i do it. This defence that i do against the lance, is also done against the sword, and against the stick: my plays come after. (46 recto)

The text is remarkably (or predictably, depending on your point of view) similar for each instance. The set-up may vary slightly, but the action is the same: step off the line with the front foot, beating aside the attacking weapon while passing on the traverse (which I take to mean diagonally forward; it is beautifully illustrated in the third and fourth pays of the sword at *zogho largo*, for instance), then striking.

We see the same actions done from both sides (the defender starting with the weapon on his right, then his left side) in the plays of the lance. Indeed this is where Fiore distinguishes most clearly between defensive guards taken on one side or the other: on page 39 recto, in the description of *porta di ferro mezana* held with the lance he says: "*E quelle de la parte dritta covramo a cum coverta passa e metteno punta. E le guardie de parte sinistra covrano e rebatteno e di colpo fierano. E non po metter chossi ben punta.*" (And these (guards) of the right side cover, and with the cover pass and place the point. And the guards of the left side cover and beat aside (the attack) and with a blow they strike and cannot place the the point so well"). This is borne out by practical experiment: for a right hander, it is much easier to place the thrust when covering from the right side, because the point can stay low; when covering from the left, as the weapon travels to the right, to point has to rise above the head, making the blow the shortest action from the end of the cover.

An interesting variation on this set-up is found in the plays of the dagger against the sword, in the beginning of the sword against dagger section, and shows the cut and the thrust, in the person of the two attackers, countered by one technique for each. The text reads:

*Qui cominza Spada e daga a zugare. La vantazo e grande a chi lo sa fare. Lo magistro spetta in questa guardia. E la guardia se chiamia dente di zenghiaro. Vegna tagli e punte che di quelle mi fo guardare. Lo pe dritto cum rebatter in dredo lu faro taro. Lo zogo stretto so a mente e non lu posso fallar. A uno a uno vegna chi contra me vol fare. Che se ello non me fuzi io guastaro in un voltare.*

Here commence the sword and the dagger to play. The advantage is great for he who knows how to do it. The Master waits in this guard. And the guard is called dente di zenghiaro. Come cut and thrust, from them I can defend myself. The right foot, while I beat aside (the attack) to the rear I make it pass. The close play I know by heart and I cannot fail (at) it. Come one by one those who would act against me. He who does not flee from me, I will ruin him in one turn.

This is followed by the defence against the thrust, and its counters. We then see the defence against the cut, the text for which reads:

*Si alo magistro che sta in posta cum la daga cum spada gli vene tratto de fendente por la testa. Ello passa inanci e questa coverta ello fa presta e da gli volta ponzando lu cubito. E quello po ferir ben subito. Anchora la spada cum lo so brazo gli poligare por quello modo che lo quarto zogo di spada duna mane sa fare. E anchora in la daga allo terzo zogo troverai quella ligadura mezana. che apresso lo volto sta serada ad una spana.*

If, to the master that stands on guard with the dagger, they wish to come with a sword and try to strike him with a *fendente* to the head, he passes forwards and this cover he does quickly; and gives him a turn pushing his elbow. And then he can strike very quickly. Also the sword with his arm he can bind as the fourth play of the sword of one hand does. And again in the third play of the dagger you will find that *ligadura mezana* (middle lock) that having wrapped closely around, remains closed up to a hand's breadth (*spana*).

Here we have only two assailants, and two different techniques, one involving a pass backwards, and the other a pass forwards. This appears to break the rule of one choice only, however, the figures wielding swords provide the clue: if the point is low and in line, you know you step back; if the point is high you have space to enter underneath, so you step forwards. This not only provides you with a simple rule of thumb to defence, it also prepares you for analysis of your opponent, which has already been covered in the introduction ("He who wishes to use the abrazare should take note of whom he fights: if the companion is stronger or if he is larger of body, and if he is too young or too old. Also, he ought to see if the companion positions himself in the guards of abrazare" (page 4 recto)). Analysis of guard positions is a key element in using this system, and will come to the fore in the sword, axe and lance sections.

So we can see that the device of a master in guard beset by multiple assailants each representing a different attack is repeated throughout the text, with minor variations specific to the weapons being used. This serves as a reminder of the unity of the system, and a way of showing the same principles at work in different contexts.

It is to be expected that certain key techniques will reoccur throughout the treatise. The most commonly repeated elements that I have found are the push to the opponent's elbow, the envelopment of his elbow with your arm (the *ligadura mezana*), the *chiave forte* (strong key) also called the *ligadura di sotto* (low tying), the *scambiar di punta* (exchange of thrust) and the *rompa di punta* (breaking the thrust). Given that most technical elements in this system have no specific names, one possible indicator of importance is that Fiore chooses to assign a name to an action. The most common counter to a cover or remedy is to step in on the other side of the weapon.

The following table gives an indication of the occurrence of the above-mentioned actions:

Technique	Incidences	Page numbers.
elbow push:	15	pp: 6v 7r 8r 11r 12r 12v 13r 16v 17r 18r 19r 21r(twice) 27r 35r
<i>Ligadura mezana</i>	7	10v 20v 28v (in text bottom right) 29r 29v 30r (on outside) 45r
<i>Ligadura di sotto</i>	9	33v 29v 18r (in text for illustration 2+3) 14r 10v 6v 37r
<i>Scambiar di punta</i>	6	23v (3 times), 24v (unnamed) , 26v (named and illustrated), 39v (named in text for <i>fenestra</i> ),
<i>Rompa di punta</i>	6	23v (3 times) 24v (unnamed) , 26v (named and illustrated), 36v (unnamed, pollax defence), 39v (beat to ground mentioned in text to <i>fenestra</i> )
Remedy by turning to other side	7	27V ( <i>punta falsa</i> and counter) 31v in text twice 39v 40r (in text 4) 44v

Looking at the spread of the techniques in question, it is unsurprising that the close-quarters techniques occur far more frequently than the armed defences; this is because the sections on the longer weapons by and large include close-quarters work, but the sections on the wrestling and dagger of course do not include actions that can only be done with a long weapon (lance axe or sword). The question of identifying these techniques is not exactly straightforward. Taking the *scambiar di punta* as an example, strictly speaking it can only be executed as a defence against a thrust; it is also only illustrated once, and only against a low thrust at that. However, the action that it entails is repeatable against high thrusts (as suggested by the text accompanying the sword guard *frontale*), and it is to all intents and purposes identical to the defence shown with the lance from guards on the right.

Let us compare the instructions given to see if this is a fair statement:

*Questo zogho si chiama scambiar de punta e se fa por tal modo zoe. Quando uno tetra una punta, subito acresse lo tuo pe che denanci fora de strada u cum laltro pe passa ala traversa anchora fora de strada, traversando la sua spada cum cum gli toi brazzi bassi, e cum la punta de la tua spada erta in lo volto o in lo petto come depento.*

This play is called *scambiar di punta* (exchange of thrust or point), and is done in this way, thus: when one brings a thrust, immediately advance your foot that is in front out of the line, and with the other foot pass on the traverse, also off the line, traversing his sword with your arms low and with the point of your sword high into the face or in the chest as depicted. (26 verso)

Now for the lance: the text over the illustration of the action itself doesn't contain any actual instructions, it just says "*In questo zogho finiseno le tre guardie che denanci sono, zoe, tutta porta di ferro, e porta di ferro la mezana, e posta de fenestra la soprana destra...*"(in this play finish the three guards that are before, thus the full iron gate, and the middle iron gate, and the high right window position...). Looking to the text (page 39 verso) accompanying the guards mentioned, we see:

#### *Tutta porta di ferro*

*...E io son lo primo che in tutta porta di ferro son posto per rebatter la lanza del zugador tosto, zoe che passaro cum lo pe dritto ala traversa fora de strada, e traversando la sua lanza rebattero in parte stanca. Si che llo passar e lo rebatter se fa in un passo cum lo ferire...*

...And I am the first, that in the full iron gate am positioned to beat aside the lance of the player opposite, thus I pass with the right foot on the traverse out of the way, and crossing his lancebeat it to the left side. The pass and the beat are done in one pass with the strike...

#### *Porta di ferro mezana*

*.... Lo rebatter e lo ferire e sempre mia usanza. E vegna chi vole cum meza lanza o stanga, che rebatter cum passo lo ferir non me manca, che tutte guardie che stano fora d'strada cum curta lanza e curta spada sono gli sufficienti a 'spettare ogni arme manuale longa. E quelle de la parte dritta covramo a cum coverta passa e metteno punta. E le guardie de parte sinistra covrano e rebatteno e di colpo fierano. E non po metter chossi ben punta."*

.... To beat him (i.e. a weapon aside) and to strike him are always my custom. And come who will with half-lance or stick, to beat aside with the pass to strike them I do not fail, all guards that stand out of the way with short lance and short sword are sufficient to await all long manual weapons. And these (guards) of the right side cover, and with the cover pass and place the point. And the guards of the left side cover and beat aside (the attack) and with a blow they strike and cannot place the the point so well.

#### *Posta di fenestra*

*Io son la nobele posta di fenestra destra, che in rebatter e ferir sempre io son presta, e de lanza lunga me curo pocho. Anchora cum la spada io 'spetteria la longa lanza stando in questa guardia che ogni punta rebatte, e si la intarda. E llo scambiar de punta io posso fare, e llo rebatter a terra non se po fallare...*

I am the noble right position of the window, that in beating and to strike always I am quick, and of the long lance I regard little. Also with the sword I await the long lance staying in this guard it beats aside all thrusts, and so it holds back. And the exchange of thrust I can do, and for the beating to the ground it cannot fail...

This raises two questions. What about the step off the line with the front foot, and is there a profound difference between the *re batter* and the *scambiar*?

If we examine the text accompanying the guard *dente di zengiaro* with the lance, we find:

*...Quelle che sono da parte dritta fano quello che fazemo de la riversa. Noy passamo fora de strada inanzi acressando lo pe che denanzi come ditto for a de strada. E de nostre punte de parte riversa fazemo derada. E tutte de parte dritta e riversa convegnemo in punta rebattendo finire...*

These (guards) that are on the right side do that which we do from the left. We pass out of the way forwards stepping the foot that is in front as I said out of the way. And of our thrusts from the left side we make a bargain. And all from the sides right and left converge in a thrust to finish the beating (aside).

Now, this may be read to imply that the step off the line with the front foot should also be done when in guard on the right; it certainly suggests that the idea of the cover and strike is the same on both sides. When we recall that the distinction made between guards on the right and left in the text describing *porta di ferro mezana* is only in how they place the thrust after the beat, it does seem likely that the cover is executed in the same way from either side. Practical experiment suggests that the step with the front foot is more often necessary when using a left-side guard, but is occasionally required while using a right side guard, particularly when defending from a more angulated thrust.

The text accompanying *fenestra*, quoted above, suggests to me that the *scambiar* and the *re batter* are distinct actions; as I read it, the *scambiar* is a thrust done in the same time as the attacker's, in which the defender voids and counterthrusts with opposition. The *re batter* requires an actual strike against the incoming weapon. In modern fencing terminology, the *scambiar* is a counterattack with opposition, the *re batter* a parry.

How about the *rompa di punta*? Is it simply any time the attacker's weapon is beaten to the ground, or does it a specific way of doing it?

The text with the illustration in which the *rompa di punta* is specifically shown (on page 26 verso) reads:

*Questa sie unaltra deffesa che se fa contra la punta zoe quando uno ti tra una punta come to detto in lo scambiare de punta in lo secondo zogo che me denanzi che se de acresser e passar fora di strada. Chossi si die far in questo zogho, salvo chelo scambiar de punta seva cum punta e cum gli brazzi bassi e cum la punta erta de la*

*spada come ditto denanzi. Ma questo se chiama romper de punta che lo scolaro va cum gli brazzi erti e pigla lo fendente cum lo acresser e passare for a de strada e tra por traverso la punta quasi a meza spada e rebater la a terra. E subito vene ale strette.*

This is another defence which you make against the thrust, thus: when one brings a thrust to you as I described to you in the *scambiar di punta*, in the second play that is before me, where you should advance and pass out of the way. So you should do in this play except that the *scambiar di punta* goes with the thrust and with the arms low and with the point above the sword as I said before. But this is called *rompere di punta* (to break the thrust/point), where the scholar goes with the arms high and grabs (with) the *fendente* with the advance and pass out of the way, and attacks traversing the thrust about at the middle of the sword and beats it to the ground. And immediately comes to the close.

So, the “*rebater a terra*” suggests that the beating to the ground is one of the defining features of the *rompa di punta*; however, the “*pigla lo fendente*” is worthy of note. It literally means to “catch (with) the downwards strike”. In practice, this means that you make contact with the incoming sword and then drive it to the ground. Using *frontale* as the text accompanying that guard suggests, we make contact with our edge to their flat, then drop our point over their blade. The sharp edges bind together briefly in contact, literally “catching”. This is quite different to the description in the guard of *posta di donna la sinistra*, which “*Ella fa grandi colpi e rompe le punte e sbattele a terra*” (she makes great blows and breaks the thrusts and beats them to the ground). As I read it, this implies either that the breaking is done with a great blow, or that in breaking the thrusts they are beaten to the ground, or that the blow, the breaking of the thrust, and the beating them to the ground, are three separate actions. The grammar, and common sense, suggests the first or second option. If we take the first interpretation, when beating the thrust to the ground with a great blow, there is usually no feeling of the edges binding, or of the blow “catching” the blade. So I support the second reading as the most likely.

Now, the only *incrosada* shown with the pollax has the heads of both weapons on the ground (page 38 verso), just as shown in the *rompa di punta* play; neither character is crowned as a remedy master. The text reads:

*Questi sono gli zoghi delli quali le guardie fano questione. Zschuna le vol piglare, cerede aver rasono. Quello che po sbatter la azza dello compagno a terra come e qui depento, questi zoghi quello fazza, tutti gli fara se lo contrario non lo impaza.*

These are the plays of those of the guards that make the question. Whichever wants to grab, would have reason. The one that can beat the axe of the companion to the ground as is here depicted, these plays that he does, all are done such that the counter doesn't make mad.

It is clear then that whoever manages to beat the axe to the ground gets to continue with the plays, and if done well there is no need to fear a counter. It does beg the question, which are the guards that make the question? None of the axe guards are described as doing so, but referring back to the sword in two hands, only *fenestra* on the right is so described. *Questione* in Italian means issue, problem, or dispute, in contrast to its more benign English cognate.

The weight and heft of the axe makes the downward blow the most natural; perhaps the archetypal axe defence is to meet an incoming *fendente* with a *fendente* of your own, driving the weapon to the ground, from whence the plays proceed.

It seems that the *coverti* defences can be classified as *rebatte*, beating aside, and *scambiar*, exchanging (the cover is simply opposition). The *rebatte* can be done as either simple blows against the incoming weapon, either up, down or to the side, or more subtle displacements (as we see in the immediate strike from the crossings at *zogho largo*), or as 'catching' the blade to drive it to the ground (which is the *rompa di punta* and only done against a low thrust). If the *rebatte* doesn't drive the weapon away sufficiently, and the weapons remain crossed, whoever is first to act will have the relevant plays available to them.

### ***The end of the beginning***

"Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning."

Sir Winston Churchill at the Lord Mayor's Luncheon, Mansion House following the victory at El Alamein in North Africa, London, 10 November 1942.<sup>1</sup>

There is a lifetime of profitable study available to any serious student of martial arts in Fiore's amazing treatise. Once we have worked out the details of every play in the treatise, and drilled them to the point that we can use them where appropriate, we have the basics of the Art. It has taken about a decade of research by many scholars worldwide to advance our understanding to the point that the core plays are mostly understood and agreed upon. In perhaps another decade, there will be a body of martial artists that can reliably call upon Fiore's system under the stress of combat. The manuscript is at last available to us in a usable form, which I hope will galvanise the study of Fiore's work. It certainly makes academic and practical research into the system much easier for us all. I hope that this introduction will serve as a starting point for a generation of new researchers, and a reference point for those already engaged in this most fascinating endeavour.

Guy Windsor  
Helsinki, April 2007

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<sup>1</sup> source: the Churchill Centre, <http://www.winstonchurchill.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=388>



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