

The South Italian Longsword of Marc'Antonio Pagano (1553)

“The greatest warrior in the world”

This article translates and contextualises the longsword bout detailed in *Le tre giornate di Marc'Antonio Pagano gentil'huomo napoletano. Dintorno alla disciplina de l'arme e spetialmente della spada sola*,¹ by Marc'Antonio Pagano, the earliest extant Southern Italian work dedicated to fencing, published in 1553, which sheds light on historical attitudes, training practices, and techniques.

Naples in 1553

The Kingdom of Naples in 1553, comprising most of mainland Italy south of Rome, was the largest state within the Italian peninsula. Under Spanish rule its capital Naples was the most populous city in the Spanish Empire, second in size only to Paris within Europe.

Early Neapolitan Fencing in the Literary Record

Despite its contemporary importance, and a rich and bloody martial history dating back many centuries, Neapolitan fencing left surprisingly few testimonies in the fencing literature prior to the late 17th century.²

Neapolitan fencing was influential enough to be referenced by foreign masters such as Meyer c.1570³ and Saint Didier in 1573.⁴

Archival records show that in 1474 the Spanish master Pons de Perpignan dedicated a now lost fencing manuscript to the King of Naples, in the Italian language.⁵

¹ Pagano, Marc'Antonio. *Le tre giornate di Marc'Antonio Pagano gentil'huomo napoletano. Dintorno alla disciplina de l'arme e spetialmente della spada sola* (Naples, 1553).

An excellent modern transcription, analysis and interpretation was published in the Italian language in 2015, by Marco De Filippo:

De Filippo, Marco. *Le tre giornate di Marc'Antonio Pagano gentil'huomo napoletano. Dintorno alla disciplina de l'arme et spetialmente della spada sola*. (Caserta, 2015).

² From the second half of the 17th century onwards a flurry of treatises were published in Southern Italy by masters in the Roman-Neapolitan lineage of the Marcelli family. The first of these was the treatise of Francesco Antonio Mattei:

Mattei, Francesco Antonio. *Della scherma napoletana* (Foggia, 1669).

Perhaps the most significant work in this tradition is that of Francesco Antonio Marcelli:

Marcelli, Francesco Antonio. *Regole della scherma insegnate da Lelio e Titta Marcelli etc.* (Rome, 1686).

³ Meyer, Joachim. *Fechtbuch zu Ross und zu Fuss* (Universitätsbibliothek Rostock, MS Var.82, c.1670) sig.123r.

⁴ De Saint Didier, Henry. *Les secrets du premier livre sur l'espée seule* (Paris, 1573) p.6.

⁵ See Ruggieri, Jole, *Manoscritti italiani nella Biblioteca dell'Escuriale* (Florence, 1933). p.425.

Paride del Pozzo published his *Duello*⁶ in Naples in 1476, a greatly influential juridical text on duelling, republished in numerous later editions and plagiarised by Marozzo⁷ in own his section on duelling customs.

The famed Neapolitan horseman Federigo Grisone barely references mounted combat in his equestrian treatise of 1550,⁸ although the military treatisist Giovanni Alberto Cassani does include a few pages on fencing in his book, published in Naples in 1603.⁹

Yet Marc'Antonio Pagano's dialogue remains the only Southern Italian work dedicated to fencing published in the 16th century.

Marc'Antonio the Man

Marc'Antonio Pagano was a gentleman of status and renown, a military man from a distinguished family in his native Naples. His father Pietro was an advisor to the crown of Naples, ambassador, and an artillery general.¹⁰

Details of Marc'Antonio's military career are fragmentary, however he appears to have served with distinction in the Spanish army, which in the 16th century contained large numbers of Neapolitan and Sicilian troops, where he was recognised for his valour in hand to hand combat.

Pagano is mentioned in a number of texts. In his time Naples was a famous centre of riding, and Pasqual Caracciolo names Marc'Antonio among other noted horsemen of the realm in his equestrian treatise of 1567.¹¹ He is then referenced in another riding treatise in 1602,¹² when Pirro Antonio Ferraro praises his extensive practice at arms, references his writings on fencing, and names a few of his students.

The historic catalogue entry from the Italian manuscripts section of the library of El Escorial reads: "Mathematicos en Toscano, in folio. Maestre Pons de esgrima, en pargamino, iluminado, escrito para el rey don Alfonso de Napoles MCCCCLXXIII."

However since Alfonso II of Naples did not become king until 1494 (Alfonso I dying in 1458), this suggests some inexactitude in the reference.

⁶ Del Pozzo, Paride. *De re militari et de duello etc.* (Naples, 1476).

⁷ Book five of Marozzo's treatise clearly copies large sections from the Italian edition of Del Pozzo's work: See: Marozzo, Achille. *Opera nova chiamata duello, o vero fiore dell'armi de singolari abattimenti offensivi et diffensivi etc.* (Modena, 1536).

⁸ See Grisone, Federigo. *Gli ordini di cavalcare di Federigo Grisone, gentil'huomo napoletano* (Naples, 1550) p.36.

⁹ Cassani, Giovanni Alberto. *Essercitio militare, il quale dispone l'huomo à vera cognitione del scrimire di spada, e dell'ordinare l'essercito à battaglia etc.* (Naples, 1603) pp.5-8.

¹⁰ De Filippo (2015) p.12.

¹¹ Caracciolo, Pasqual. *La gloria del cavallo* (Venice, 1567) p.142.

¹² Ferraro, Pirro Antonio. *Cavallo Frenato Di Pirro Antonio Ferraro Napolitano etc.* (Naples, 1602) pp.68-69.

Marc'Antonio is further recorded as a notable supporter of the violent Neapolitan insurrection of 1547, which succeeded in overturning the Spanish viceroy's attempt to impose the Inquisition in Naples "in the manner of Spain".¹³

Further details of Marc'Antonio's life are found in the fencing manuscript of his nephew, Cesare Pagano. This esoteric work discusses fencing entirely through dense, practically indecipherable classical allegory.¹⁴ Yet among Cesare's many digressions, he includes several references to Marc'Antonio, including his year of birth in 1503.¹⁵

Cesare narrates a heroic episode¹⁶ where Marc'Antonio was attacked by a unit of light cavalry at "Rocca Imbruna".¹⁷ Outnumbered and under a rain of attacks, Marc'Antonio held firm, never abandoning the fray, and emerged victorious, putting the entire unit to rout.

So impressive was Pagano's stand that the Marquis of Vasto¹⁸ presented Marc'Antonio's heavily notched sword, reduced to "the effigy of a saw", to the Emperor Charles V.

Cesare then recounts how the Emperor publicly recognised Marc'Antonio, on the occasion of his imperial coronation by the pope, in Bologna in 1530:

Dissatisfied with Maestro Battista, who was the finest fencer of his age, and becoming very fond of Marc'Antonio, in the presence of many princes he deigned him worthy to be called (to avoid calling him a Maestro) "the greatest warrior in the world".

Finally Cesare provides a physical description of Marc'Antonio: as tall and powerfully built, with a bald head, bushy eyebrows, and a bifurcated beard almost to his belt, noting that from

¹³ See Castaldo, Antonino. *Dell'istoria di notar Antonino Castaldo libri quattro etc.* (Naples, 1769) p.85.

¹⁴ See Pagano, Cesare. *Disegno del signor Cesare Pagano, cavaliere napoletano, su'l vero teatro di Marte, per la teorica della schrimmia.* (1592, Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze, XIX, 194, Magliabecchiana).

For example sig.23v:

"What is Measure?"

Vultures are birds of prey: although they are most innocent according to Herclides Ponticus as they do not touch any of the things that we commonly deal with. They make their nests on top of very tall cliffs. They detest ointments. They are useful for many medicines according to Plinius. They are a welcome omen, as manifestly shown by Hercules and the first King of Rome who among those who through various human prudences, easily restrained the enemies of mankind in their laps. They impregnate themselves (in the opinion of Ambrosius) from the wind Zephyr. They are the symbol of the year, of nature, of compassion, of justice, of death, of wandering, of concupiscence, and of other things, as touched upon by Tertullian, by Basil and by Adamantius. They are under the protection of Mars, from which came the practice of sending to watch (when ordering troops) which way the vultures were watching, the ancients judging that victory would come from that direction."

¹⁵ Ibid. sig.26r.

¹⁶ Ibid. sig.25v.

¹⁷ This could refer to Roccabruna in Piedmont, or else to Roquebrune in modern Provence, close to the modern Italian border. Cesare does not give the year in which this action took place, but it could plausibly have been during the Italian War of 1521-1526, or during the War of the League of Cognac between 1526-1530.

¹⁸ From 1525 this title was held by Alfonso d'Avalos, a famous condottiere, born on the island of Ischia not far from Naples.

the age of forty-nine he dedicated the last ten years his life to instructing others in the arts of combat.¹⁹

Le tre giornate di Marc'Antonio Pagano

Published in February 1553 Pagano's work is presented as a dialogue, between Pagano, the Duke of Amalfi, the Prince of Stigliano and other illustrious gentlemen, set over the course of three days at some point between the end of 1549 and the beginning of 1550.²⁰

Later in 1553, Camillo Agrippa would publish his own treatise in Rome.²¹ Presupposing for the most part a single-handed sword employed in an unarmoured civilian milieu, his thrust-centric approach presaged later rapier styles.

Pagano's outlook could scarcely be more different, military in its orientation and selection of weapons, having more in common with medieval works, than later 17th century systems.

His does not present a treatise of systematic technical instructions. Rather its technical content is woven among ample digressions, with frequent classical allusions, presented in rather literary language.

The martial substance of the text is largely contained in brief technical discussions on the sword alone, and on wrestling, as well as in descriptions of three contests between two of Pagano's students who are also his nephews, Gioan Girolamo Pagano and Mutio Pagano.²²

The first of these encounters, translated in this article, sees Gioan Girolamo and Mutio clash with two-handed longwords.

The second is an encounter with a "hafted knife", which appears to be a type of glaive or similar polearm, also furnished with a small hook. The third sees the pair face off with long "German pikes", the match developing into a fight with daggers.

A Brief Overview of Pagano's Technical Framework²³

Attacks

Pagano defines the cuts as: *mandritto*, *roverso*,²⁴ *falciata*, and *montante*.

Mandritto and *roverso* are common fencing terms, denoting cuts respectively formed from the right and left side from a right-handed fencer.

¹⁹ Pagano (1592) sig.30v-31r.

²⁰ See De Filippo (2015) p.15.

²¹ Agrippa, Camillo. *Trattato di scientia d'arme* (Rome, 1553).

²² While Marc'Antonio's work implies the two were brothers, other contemporary evidence suggests they were in fact first cousins. See De Filippo (2015) p.13.

²³ For a more detailed and comprehensive analysis see De Filippo (2015) pp.35-102.

²⁴ Also spelled as *riverso* or *rovescio*.

For Pagano these seem to refer to descending cuts with the true edge, along an oblique line, analogous to Marozzo's *mandritto sguaembrato* and *roverso sguaembrato*.²⁵

Falciata, literally a scything blow, is Pagano's term for a horizontal cut, comparable to the Bolognese Marozzo's *tondo*, or Fiore's *mezano*.²⁶ Pagano is explicit that these blows can also be aimed to the face.²⁷

Montante is a common fencing term for a rising blow. For Pagano these appear to be delivered with the false edge,²⁸ Pagano specifying that they can be aimed at an opponent's hand or the knee.²⁹

The thrusts are termed: *imbroccata*, *punta dritta*, and *punta roversa*. The *imbroccata* is a common fencing term, for a descending overhand thrust. The *punta dritta*, otherwise termed *stoccata*, refers to an underhand thrust. The *punta roversa* is a common fencing term for a thrust with the palm turned upwards.

Pagano further categorises these blows, stating that there are five natural attacks from the right and five from the left; being three from above, three from the middle and four from below.

From above the *mandritto*, *roverso*, and *imbroccata*; from the middle the left and right *falciata*, and a *punta roversa*; from below the left and right *montante*, the *punta dritta* and the *punta roversa*.

In addition he distinguishes between three categories of attacks: *colpi semplici*, *colpi composti* and *colpi raddoppiati*. These being respectively simple attacks (a single action), composite attacks (two or more attacks in sequence), and redoubled attacks (when an attack is repeated on the same line).

Tempo and Measure

Blows can be in *tutto tempo*, or *mezzo tempo*,³⁰ seemingly analogous to the Bolognese *tempo intiero*, and *mezzo tempo*.³¹ The former relates to attacks that complete their full trajectory, usually from wide measure. The latter are employed in close measure, often interrupting the enemy's attack, the trajectory of the blow arrested to leave the point in presence, in order to defend and maintain an immediate threat.

²⁵ For Marozzo's terminology for cuts see Marozzo (1536) sig.48v.

²⁶ De Liberi, Fiore. *Fior di Battaglia*. (c.1410 J. Paul Getty Museum, MS Ludwig XV 13) fol.23r.

²⁷ Pagano (1553) p.157.

²⁸ De Filippo (2015) p.77-78.

²⁹ See Pagano (1553) p.157-158.

³⁰ *Ibid.* p.148-151.

³¹ See for example: Viggiani, Angelo. *Lo schermo etc.* (Venice, 1575) p.64.

This conception is linked to Pagano's two measures: *gioco largo* and *gioco ristretto*. Respectively close play and wide play, a straightforward distinction held in common with contemporary systems.

Pagano distinguishes three possible times in which to attack: *inanzi il tempo*, *nel tempo* and *dopo il tempo*.³² Respectively these are: ahead of tempo, in tempo, and after the tempo. The first represents attacks before the enemy has moved, or into their preparation. The second strikes which interrupt the enemy's attacks. The third blows after the enemy's attacks conclude.

Pagano specifies that defences can be either *inanzi il tempo* or *nel tempo*. The former interrupting the opponent's action, or beating their sword away, the latter consisting of both defences with the sword and evasions of the body.

Defensive voids are employed: laterally, backwards, and in one instance ducking beneath a blow from the hafted knife.³³ Pagano describes such action using the terms: *storcere la persona* meaning "to turn the body", as well as *schifata*, and *scansata*, being synonyms for "void" or "dodge".³⁴

Parries are described as either blocking or deflecting the opponent's weapon.³⁵

Movement

Although not extensively schematised, Pagano's system encompasses a variety of motions and steps. He describes both stepping with the front foot, and passing footwork (using the terms *passare* or *trapassare*), stating that movement can be forward, back, left or right.³⁶

Pagano describes withdrawing the front foot for defence, *ritrare il piè*.³⁷ He also mentions a *ripresa*, literally "recovery". Although not precisely defined, in line with contemporary systems this likely describes gathering forward the rear foot before stepping forward with the front foot.³⁸

He also cites the *cambiata* or "change" of feet, demonstrating a void to the side with a step during the combat with hafted knives.³⁹ Again this action is not explicitly described, but it likely corresponds either to the Bolognese *cambiare di piedi* or else the *passare di*

³² Ibid. pp.180-183.

³³ Ibid. p.112.

³⁴ Ibid. p.105. and p.181.

³⁵ Ibid. p.183.

³⁶ Ibid. p.182.

³⁷ Ibid. p.113.

³⁸ De Filippo (2015) p.53.

³⁹ Pagano (1553) p.65. and p.116.

triangolo.⁴⁰ Pagano implicitly acknowledges commonalities with contemporary Italian systems when he mentions “the Italian use of *cambiar di piedi*.”⁴¹

Pagano mentions *contrapassi* “countersteps” to one or other side, which arguably recalls Docciolini’s extensive use of offline countersteps to the *traversi*.⁴²

He employs the word *quartiare*, literally “to quarter,”⁴³ and later describes stepping *di quarto*,⁴⁴ literally “of quarter/fourth” to avoid a thrust. This action seems analogous to the later *inquartata*.

The term *scorrere*, literally “to flow” or “to slide”, is used to describe movement forward or backwards. While not precisely defined this appears to apply to non-passing footwork, in attack possibly concluding in a lunge. De Filippo postulates this term may be linked to the *passo scurso* of the 17th century Roman-Neapolitan school,⁴⁵ where it denotes a form of advance lunge (i.e. a step forward immediately followed by a lunge).

Like the contemporary Bolognese school,⁴⁶ Pagano advocates moving the hand and foot in concert,⁴⁷ conceptualising attacks as beginning and ending in a guard.⁴⁸

Guards

Pagano directly describes only guards for the single sword, naming them in simple numerical fashion from one through to four: *prima*, *seconda*, *terza* and *quarta*. Publishing later in the same year, Agrippa employs these same terms, however with different relative positions.

Pagano’s *prima* is described as follows:

... *the guard of prima, in which I want a man to hold himself upright, with his hand held high, his arm extended, with his right foot forward, his legs rather gathered together with his knees straight.*⁴⁹

⁴⁰ Anonimo Bolognese. *L'arte della spada* (Biblioteca Classense di Ravenna MS 345 and 346, early 16th Century). Edited by, Marco Rubboli, and Luca Cesari (Rimini 2005). pp.29-30.

“Cambiare di piedi” refers to gathering the front foot back to the rear foot, before stepping forward more or less obliquely with the rear foot. “Passare di triangolo” describes stepping by bringing the rear foot forward, more or less obliquely, bringing the (formerly) front foot back.

⁴¹ Pagano (1553) p.167.

⁴² Docciolini, Marco. *Trattato in materia di scherma* (Florence, 1601).

⁴³ Pagano (1553) p.144.

⁴⁴ Ibid. p.190.

⁴⁵ De Filippo (2015) p.53.

⁴⁶ See for example Marozzo (1536) sig.2v.

⁴⁷ “Those who do not move their hand and foot in the same tempo, in the attacking and defensive actions, are likewise without discipline and awareness”. See Pagano (1553) p.179.

⁴⁸ Ibid. p.153.

⁴⁹ Ibid. p.155.

The direction of the point is not specified, however a later comparison with *terza*, which clearly points towards the opponent, indicates the is point forward also in *prima*.⁵⁰

Pagano's *prima* would therefore resemble that of Agrippa,⁵¹ being a very common position in contemporary systems. Other comparisons could be made with Marozzo's *beca cesa*, Altoni's *unicorno*, the Anonimo Riccardiano's *falcone*, or with the arm less extended to Viggiani's *seconda alta offensiva perfetta*.⁵²

Pagano's *seconda* is described following a pass, while delivering a *mandritto*:

*Your hand should end low on your left side, where it is reasonable that seconda should be formed, I say in the following manner. Your left foot should be somewhat forward, with your left foot in line with the arch of the same foot. The knee of the right leg should be straight, with your toes pointing outwards, almost directed towards your enemy, with your arm low, such that your sword's point is aimed at his eyes.*⁵³

The most immediate comparison is with the Bolognese *porta di ferro cinghiara*.⁵⁴

This is followed by a *roverso* to the enemy's right side, passing the right foot forward and forming *terza*, which is described as follows:

*It is similar to prima, except with the hand lower, at mid-height, from where you will deliver the third attack, which is a stoccata.*⁵⁵

This position appears analogous to the Bolognese *coda lunga e stretta* or *coda lunga e alta*, but could also be approximated to Pietro Monte's *prima*, Altoni's *guardia destra alta* or *guardia destra mezzana*, the Anonimo Riccardiano's *prima guardia*, or Lovino's *guardia di fuora*.⁵⁶

The *stoccata* that follows is accompanied by an extension of the front foot, essentially constituting a lunge, into *quarta*:

...such that the hand comes to fall over your right knee, where the guard of quarta is formed, without otherwise moving the hand from that area, but with your legs more gathered, and

⁵⁰ De Filippo (2015) p.69.

⁵¹ Agrippa (1553) sig.A3r.

⁵² See Marozzo (1536) sig.46v; Altoni, Francesco di Sandro. *Monomachia: trattato dell'arte di scherma* (Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati di Siena MS L.V.23 and Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze MS II.III.315, c.1540). Edited by Alessandro Battistini, Massimo (sic) Rubboli, and Iacopo Venni (Rimini, 2007). pp.65-66; Anonimo Riccardiano. *Trattato di scherma* (Biblioteca Riccardiana MS Ricc.2541, c.1560). Edited by Alessandro Battistini and Iacopo Venni (Rimini, 2009) pp.31-32; Viggiani (1575) sig.67r.

⁵³ Pagano (1553) pp.155-156.

⁵⁴ See Marozzo (1536) sig.38v.

⁵⁵ Pagano (1553) p.156.

⁵⁶ See Marozzo (1536) sig.37v-38r and sig.46v-47r; Altoni (2007) pp.56-57; Monte, Pietro. *Exercitiorum Atque Artis Militaris Collectanea* (Milan, 1509) Chapter XXVIII; Anonimo Riccardiano (2009) pp.26-28; Lovino, Giovanni Antonio. *Prattica e theorica del bene adoperare tutte le sorte di armi* (Bibliothèque Nationale de France MS Italien 959, c.1580) Chapter II.

*with your chest more forward so it faces the ground, and with your arm extended your point will be directed at your opponent's face.*⁵⁷

Possible comparisons are with the Bolognese *porta di ferro stretta*, or Altoni's *guardia di mezzo mezzano* or *guardia sinistra mezzana*.⁵⁸ The detail of the chest leant forward evokes the guards of of Joachim Meyer, although without Meyer's characteristic wide stance.⁵⁹

General Considerations

For Pagano the foundations of fencing are: *tempo*, *velocità* and *inganno*,⁶⁰ timing, speed and deception.

Interestingly Pagano also defines categories of intent, in relation to both attack and defence: *gioco terminato*, *gioco tentato* and *gioco finto*.⁶¹ These can be translated respectively as completed play, attempting play, and feinting play.

Gioco terminato relates to actions completed in their entirety with full intent:

*...based upon deliberate actions of the sword and the feet, without thought of revoking them during motion.*⁶²

Pagano noting that it is useful in attack, this play encompasses fully committed attacks, although Pagano specifies that the *gioco terminato* is not limited to *colpi semplici* but also encompasses composite and redoubled attacks. As with the other types of play, this is a tactical and psychological categorisation, the *gioco terminato* representing decisive actions.

The *gioco tentato* is perhaps the most intriguing. Pagano specifies it is particularly useful in the *gioco stretto*, and again it can be expressed not just in simple, but also in composite or redoubled attacks, also being useful for provocations. Pagano describes the *gioco tentato* in these terms:

*It consists of actions, motions and movements of the sword suspended in thought, ready to be revoked, to abort any action and nimbly commence with another which may arise in that instant.*⁶³

As a category of intent, the *gioco tentato* can be compared to what are sometimes termed eyes-open actions in modern fencing.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ Pagano (1553) p.156.

⁵⁸ See Marozzo (1536) sig.41r and Altoni (2009) pp.51-56.

⁵⁹ See Meyer, Joachim. *Gründtliche Beschreibung der Kunst des Fechtens* (Strasbourg, 1570).

⁶⁰ Pagano (1553) p.100.

⁶¹ Ibid. p.143-144 and p.163-169.

⁶² Ibid. p.164-165.

⁶³ Pagano (1553) p.166.

⁶⁴ See for example: Czajkowski, Zbigniew. *Understanding Fencing* (New York, 2005) p.57.

The *gioco finto*, as its name suggests relates to composite actions, based upon deception and feints:

*This is the movement of the sword and body to the contrary of how they first appeared.*⁶⁵

For Pagano these are applicable either in attack or defence, and both in wide and close measure. Again this can refer to deceitful play in a general sense, to intent or to a mindset, not only to specific feinting actions, although Pagano does provide the example of a feint *inanzi tempo*, before delivering an attack *nel tempo* or *dopo tempo*.

Pagano's Longsword Bout

A highlight of Pagano's work is a rare detailed account of a contemporary longsword bout.

The nephews open often with thrusts to the face or chest, whether with full intent to land, or feinting or mutating into another action, otherwise opening with cuts to the high lines.

These opening attacks are often followed by cuts to the legs. This may seem surprising, since actions to the low lines can leave a fencer exposed. However cuts to the legs could arguably debilitate more reliably than cuts to the torso, and in the 16th century legs were less liable to be armoured than the body.

The fencers defend themselves both with the sword and with voids back or to the side, but are not slow to collapse the action into a grapple, a pattern also seen in the nephews' subsequent bouts.

Indeed there are several wrestling actions, Pagano emphasising his students' accomplishment also in this art. This indicates how important wrestling was considered regarding a fencer's overall ability.

Exhibition Bouts in Their Cultural Context

We must suppose this account idealised. We see a long sequence of actions before the bout reaches a conclusion, and Pagano is narrating a combat between his own students and nephews.

Yet Pagano's account is paradoxical. At the end of the bout he is close to tears of joy from his students' prowess. But he is also troubled by their excessive competitiveness and ardour, exacerbated because they are close relatives.

After the bout he upbraids his students in blunt terms, suggesting they should have fenced at a gentler pace, demonstrating more variety of technique.

There are two explanations for this apparent contradiction.

The first is explained by the Duke of Amalfi. The young men's play was in fact splendid, and Pagano's admonishment was at least in part a ruse, to prevent the proud young men from becoming conceited, and thereby complacent.

⁶⁵ Pagano (1553) p.168.

The second is that there seems to have been a cultural expectation for exhibition bouts to be performed at a somewhat conventional intensity. However this expectation competed with contradictory respect for fast, virile, and ultimately victorious fencers.

Pagano frequently emphasises the young men's speed, aggression and power. Despite Pagano's protestations, it is reasonable to suppose he considered these elements laudable, *velocità* being one of Pagano's cardinal fencing virtues.

This tension between playing to win, and to present a fine display can be found in a number of sources, with remarkably similar observations across several centuries.⁶⁶

Describing exhibition bouts, Giovanni Battista Gaiani observed in 1619:

You act in the interests of your honour when you draw your sword to earn or maintain reputation. For example if some prince, wishing to see a master's worth, obliges him to employ his sword in his presence.

In such occasions the master must obey, and display his knowledge, out of respect for the prince mixed with respect and courtesy, demonstrating that he would be capable of much more than he reveals. It is very true that if his opponent does not respect him, but seek to beat him by any means, and make him lose face, in this case the master should respond in kind.

*But in such instances a judicious prince should quickly separate them, and end the combat.*⁶⁷

Later in 1704, Capodivacca makes much the same observation:

*When you play with buttoned swords in the presence of the grand majesty of princes, first you must show the necessary profound reverence towards them, then to your opponent, and again at the end, when wishing to land the final blow, called the Morosa.*⁶⁸

...You therefore wait warmly for your opponent, offering him the same reverence you give to all. This is the way it should be practised, whether slightly more or slightly less matters little, however it is always laudable when performed with courtesy.

Note well that having the honour of playing in front of such great personages, you must practice every respect and modesty, and not dare to fall into the minimum of anger, assuming however that your opponent employs the same respect. But if he gets carried away more than he should, you should respond in kind, to avoid being overwhelmed, doing what you can to emerge victorious.

⁶⁶Arguably the distinction between knightly combat *à outrance*, or *à plaisance* is an early antecedent of this. While in 1660 Senese distinguishes between recreational fencing against friends or respected opponents, which calls for restraint and modesty, and non-lethal fencing where the blows "have to speak for themselves, without leaving any excuse". See: Senese, Alessandro. *Il vero maneggio di spada* (Bologna, 1660) pp. 6-7.

See also the Iberian distinction between *Batalhas* and *Brigas*: <http://ageaeditora.com/en/dandis-pomposos-e-briguentos-usos-e-costumes-nas-salas-de-armas-ibericas-dos-s-xvi-e-xvii/>

⁶⁷ Gaiani, Giovanni Battista. *Arte di maneggiar la spada a piedi et a cavallo etc.* (Loano, 1619) p.5.

⁶⁸ Literally the lover or sweetheart.

*I know that such a bitter assault would lead to great displeasure and sorrow. Yet I also know it is enough to be noted by the serene eyes of the princes, who can tell and distinguish who transgressed the usual and due conventions.*⁶⁹

Protective Equipment and Historical Training

Before the exhibition bout, the two nephews are heard fencing, and it is reasonable to assume Pagano's narrative provides insights into the fencing culture and training practices of his time.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the account is the protective equipment the nephews wear, not unreasonably since their speed and intensity is emphasised many times.

The assembled gentlemen are aghast the two might consider fencing with *spadoni* without protection, since the pair initially appear unarmoured, but are reassured when they see the combatants are wearing protection under their civilian clothing. This protection may have included metal armour under their clothes, although a number of purpose-designed 16th century fencing doublets survive, sometimes reinforced with whalebone or wood.⁷⁰

Most remarkably the nephews are described as wearing metal masks which covered their faces. Similar masks are depicted from the 17th century, with surviving examples attributed to later centuries preserved in some collections. Pagano's account indicates these were in use from at least the 16th century.

The use of metal head protection is perhaps less remarkable. In Iberia broad-brimmed metal hats for fencing appear commonplace, even obligatory, from the 15th century onwards:

*In the Real Cedula de nombramiento del Maestro Mayor Gomez Dorado (a royal decree appointing Gomez Dorado as fencing «grand master» — the public office which regulated and presided over fencing in the kingdom) granted by the Catholic Kings on June 4, 1478 in Zaragoza, it specifies that the Master has the obligation to make sure that his disciples wear a protective cap on their head. The hat provides considerable protection to the head and face, especially if it sports a wide brim. Luis Diaz de Viedma (1639) wrote that pieces of the hats' brims could end up littering the floor of fencing salles. Tomas Luis (1685), not so concerned with safety as with pride, writes in his Lições da Espada Preta that if you are wounded in the head, instead of showing the wound by removing the hat, we should tighten it down to stop the bleeding and keep fighting and therefore not give your opponent the satisfaction of knowing their strike connected. It was also considered good practice for blows aimed at the opponent's face not to finish them, but deflect them instead towards the brim of the hat, knocking it to the ground.*⁷¹

⁶⁹ Capodivacca, Paolo. *Massime et avvertimenti da praticarsi nella scherma* (Padua, 1704) pp.11-12.

⁷⁰ Another possibility is that they were wearing a heavy gambeson or arming jacket. As early as the 13th century the King's Mirror recommends practicing fencing in a heavy gambeson, if not in mail. See: Larson, Laurence Marcellus. *The King's Mirror* (New York, 1917) p.212.

⁷¹ See: <http://ageaeditora.com/en/dandis-pomposos-e-briguentos-usos-e-costumes-nas-salas-de-armas-ibericas-dos-s-xvi-e-xvii/>

In subsequent bouts the nephews appear in more obvious protection, although its form is not precisely described. On the second day they meet with hafted knives. At the start of the bout Marc'Antonio invites them to reveal themselves "from under their defensive armour", many attacks are aimed at the "visor" and they are described as wearing a cuirass although during the combat a gap in the protection is found under the armpit.⁷² On the third day, fighting with "German pikes", the nephews are described as "covered by infantry armour".⁷³

⁷² Pagano (1553) pp.106-119.

⁷³ Ibid. pp.189.

Translation of the Longsword Bout Between Gioan Girolamo Pagano and Mutio Pagano⁷⁴

The others likewise thought to retire for the evening, when they were all stopped by the commotion of a great noise. Without having time to take stock they were moved to say: “part the two brothers, before they kill each other!”

At once everyone rose with their hands at their swords, moving towards the origin of the troublesome noise, each running towards the exit of the room.

There were soon so many lighted torches that it seemed not to be night, but as a clear day without the veil of fog, therefore as soon as they arrived they could see the figures of Gioan Girolamo Pagano and Mutio, also a Pagano. They faced each other with two handed swords, and thundered against each other with blows which stunned the onlookers with the courage they showed.

Sir Don Costantino, as one of those aware of their play, quickly said in a loud voice: “halt my good fellows, that you will witness two valiant men!”

At these words many were opposed, asserting worriedly that it shouldn't be allowed for two youngsters to partake in this play with two handed swords, unarmoured as they appeared.

The Prince and the Duke of Amalfi, as it happens gentlemen not easily frightened by such games, even they were suddenly struck with concern; and would have been even more so, had Pagano not assured them that the play between the two would end well.

This was because, having left space for the combatants, as the two youngsters presented themselves, facing each other with their *spadoni*, all their apparel seemed normal. But nonetheless underneath they were armoured, which none of those present, however discerning they might have been, had noticed.

The most appropriate measure was that they had hats on their head, made in such a way that as soon as they lifted them, an iron mask came out to cover their faces.

Pagano divided the two of them, and from that moment, having taken a step back, suddenly they produced fierce blows, touching their hands to their hats so that their faces remained armoured.

They were strong with their swords in hand, and by God with such speed that they seemed two bolts of lightning entwining one other.

In this manner, with a rapid movement, in the act of a *mandritto* (as fencers call it) Mutio proceeded towards the head, pushing himself forward with his right foot.

During this action Gioan Girolamo passed his left foot forward, placing his sword in the middle of the other, in so doing forming a cross such that he managed to protect himself from the blow, and pushing his left leg forward he responded with a *mandritto* of his own to the legs.

⁷⁴ Pagano (1553) pp.53-68.

His opponent found his defence by parrying low with a *mandritto* of his own, then without delay returned with a *roverso* to towards Gioan Girolamo's face, who after voiding backwards, wasted no time in returning forward, rushing upon him with a thrust towards the chest.

Beating it away with a *mandritto* cut, Mutio pushed forward a thrust of his own sword, and he would have found an opening, were it not parried by the crossguard (which is the term for the horizontal metal bar at the top of the handle), rendering the force of the thrust in vain.

From here Gioan Girolamo had no other possible action or tempo, except having diverted the thrust, to quickly move to deliver a *roverso* to the legs, pulling his right foot back.

Mutio imitated this by withdrawing, employing this same defence to void the blow.

At this point Gioan Girolamo returned towards the head with a forceful *mandritto*.

Mutio parried with a *mandritto*. Had this not been so judicious and fast, the fact his head was covered in iron would not have helped him.

Then without delay, not leaving a tempo at the crossing of the swords, he passed forward amply with his left foot, towards Gioan Girolamo's right side. He put his left hand to the outside of Gioan Girolamo's right arm, reaching to grab the handle of his opponent's sword, while at the same time positioning his point towards his chest.

At this point Gioan Girolamo, realising the danger of losing his sword, abandoned his weapon, then strongly with his right, wrapping his arm around his opponent's waist, sought to force him onto his hip (such that any slight movement would have taken him to ground).

Mutio, being astute and cunning in wrestling, at just the right moment took his hand from his opponent's sword, creating a hold on Gioan Girolamo's neck forcing him into a *garzana*,⁷⁵ which among wrestlers is the term for the action where, with your leg between the two of your opponent, almost like snaking ivy, it wraps around one leg, so with the force of a push it slips, bringing ruin.

Gioan Girolamo however, likewise experienced in this discipline, noticed his gambit, and due to an imperfection in the timing, the hold was not completely locked. With a great push from his elbow underneath Mutio's left armpit he lowered his head enough to free himself from the hold, with such skill that it raised the eyebrows of those watching.

Mutio, finding his hold empty, would have fallen to the ground from the impact, were he not so agile of body and keen of judgement, but found himself in an awkward position. Nonetheless in the blink of an eye, and with well-measured timing, he sprang back and returned his hand to his sword.

At this point Gioan Girolamo was not slow to return to his side, skilfully resetting himself, such that it seemed to the onlookers they had left each other space to recover, which was not the case nor their intention.

⁷⁵ The precise origin of this term is uncertain, however the action itself is clearly described.

Therefore, with no delay whatsoever, they launched themselves at each other. First Mutio sent a thrust towards the face and his left foot forward, before passing with his right, seeing fit to strike a *mandritto* to the legs.

The outcome did not match the intention however, since Gioan Girolamo, standing agile and ready, saw the point and covered with a *mandritto*, such that with this *mezzo mandritto*⁷⁶ he impeded the thrust above, similarly defending himself with a *mandritto* below.

In that instant he extended a thrust, but diverting from the intention to land, then directed a *roverso* towards the legs. This was performed at great speed, such that Mutio had time to parry only the thrust by extending his sword, and he would have been struck had he not withdrawn his leg to void the *roverso*.

Mutio then quickly returned his foot to its former position, and delivered a thrust towards the right side of Gioan Girolamo's face, seeming to strike a *mandritto* before changing it into *roverso* while passing his left foot forward.

Unable to void backwards, however hard he might try, Gioan Girolamo instead moved forwards, blocking his opponent's sword by crossing it with his own.

His parry was not so fast, that Mutio could not come to perform the so-called grapple of the *uncino*,⁷⁷ advancing his left foot to put it behind Gioan Girolamo's right, while at the same time placing his left hand on his chest.

Were Gioan Girolamo not alert to this trick, his shoulders would have been dusted by the ground. But he lifted his foot so quickly that it rendered Mutio's every effort and intention vain.

Seeing Mutio's left hand off his sword Gioan Girolamo thrust towards his chest. But Mutio quickly voided by moving aside, without wasting a moment returned his hand to his sword and put it to gainful use.

He delivered a sudden *roverso* towards Gioan Girolamo's right shoulder, having a clear opening to attack, finding him uncovered. Gioan Girolamo, like a lion, immediately parried, raising his hands such that his point (as happens) was directed downwards, and the middle of his sword was struck by his enemy's.

He wasted little time in coming to grapple, dropping his right hand from his sword onto his enemy's, in such a manner that his arm bound both of Mutio's hands. From here he tried to prise the sword away with his arm, with an act of force such that Mutio's sword would fall from hands.

Seeing the risk, Mutio immediately moved his right hand from his sword onto the handle of his opponent's.

Gioan Girolamo, without otherwise freeing himself from the grapple, with his right hand

⁷⁶ Literally a half *mandritto*.

⁷⁷ Literally "hook".

grabbed Mutio's right arm, prying it so that his sword fell to the floor, while in the same tempo stepping with his right foot to Mutio's right, pulling him towards him by the arm such that he turned towards the ground.

But Mutio, an expert in such grapples, in a few seconds quickly extended his left foot between Gioan Girolamo's legs from behind.

He arrived almost at his opponent's left foot, moving across and strongly shoving the top of Gioan Girolamo's right arm with his left hand, such that Gioan Girolamo seemed apt to fall more than once, and would have accompanied Mutio's sword to the ground, had not the wall he found for support been such a firm buttress.

Mutio was then so quick to retrieve his sword that some among the onlookers were certain it was another sword, passed to him by other hands.

Oh what sweet applause towards the two youngsters followed. What clamour there truly was, one voice confusedly following another, with nothing less than universal commendation mixed with wonder, praising the daring, skill, strength and experience of such expert champions at arms.

Pagano would have openly shed tears from inner joy as master to such singular disciples, had he not forbidden on the other hand so many signs of competitiveness from the two youngsters of his own blood; not without passion that flames into anger, when carefree youth turns prideful in the hunger for victory.

Being somewhat moved to express this, not before eliciting their ardent anticipation, he turned to them and said:

“Now listen sweet children, since the tenderness of blood spurs me to this. There was beauty and enchantment in your play, in forming grapples and breaking them. The ugliness was in the obstinance of the grapples, no less since you both fell into this error. It could already be thought a flaw that one venomously thwarted the other's action. It happens that the engagements were laudable and beautiful, however they cannot be called playful, but rather wrathful.

It would have been praiseworthy had the end of the bout resembled the beginning. By this I mean having kept to simple actions, slowly introducing composite actions, and gradually redoubled actions,⁷⁸ varying these however. Stepping in attack and defence, observing the *tempi*, when to change feet; when to glide forward, turn to one side, or move back.

Youngsters, knowing the play comprehensively is not enough. Because you cannot call yourself complete if you do not demonstrate more in defence from standing, in attacking with ripostes, in impeding the opposing sword from moving back, and from moving forward in attack. Alternating the *tempi*; when to meet the sword's approach with the true edge, false edge, or the point; and when ahead of tempo, in tempo, or after tempo.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ In the original respectively: *semplici*, *composti*, and *raddoppiati*.

⁷⁹ In the original respectively: *inanzi il tempo*, *nel tempo*, and *dopo il tempo*.

It seems I must remind you how to vary the play. Although you hinted at many variations depending on the opportunity and the situation, you should have performed them, so these gentlemen would have had more distinct satisfaction.

This by having one play develop from another, from wide play to close play,⁸⁰ from the *determinato* to the *tentato*, and from the *tentato* to the *finto*. Alternating everything however, from attacking plays to searching for the sword; from moving your body to plays from standing; from light flits of the sword provoking to deceive, to a strong sword, and to refusals.

But even this amounts to little, you must be minded to vary your defences, which I have told you with a thousand breaths how to perform, with your sword as well as with your body.

It would also have been enchanting to have shown the defences of all the guards, and how to break them. Then proceeding onto the deceits with which you can defeat your enemy: when he proceeds forward to attack, when he stands alert waiting to counterattack, when he steps from one side to another, or when he depends upon passing footwork and strikes from switching his feet.

I will speak no further, to avoid bothering these gentlemen, and because the hour does not allow it, being more apt for quiet than discussions such as this. But to make amends for this base error, prepare to entertain these gentlemen once again, with another display of arms when they return from hunting tomorrow. But remember not to give me reason to chastise you, which for many good reasons is undesirable for you and for me in this place.”

With these and other words, it seemed to all (although it was night) that Pagano had made the youngsters’ cheeks blush, at which point they took their leave. The honoured Duke of Amalfi turned to the others and said:

“This combat was splendid, at once stirring, and a sweet delectation for the eyes.

On the other hand, it was troubling to see blows with such intent, delivered with such skill and strength, without one leaving *tempi* for the other, with such ferocity that it could almost be defined a capital case and did not seem an act of play.

This more than ever when one stole the tempo from the other: with feints, varying the motions of the sword, and every other movement; leading the other to waiver, without one having regard for the other, despite being branches from the same tree.

In order that the play might delight us even more, at a good juncture they came to grapple and wrestle. They showed themselves so resolute that watching them barely left us a chance to breathe, both from the fearsomeness of their actions, and from such never-before seen novelty.

Yet sir Marc’Antonio, being a shrewd gentleman, did not want to tell them how good they were. As a judicious man he understands the danger of vaunting courageous youths when they act valiantly. He sees that whenever lauded for some action of theirs, the praise leads

⁸⁰ In the original respectively *largo* and *ristretto*.

them to stop exerting themselves towards advancement. Instead they bask in it, the praise makes them believe they have reached the height of every virtue.”

Others would have followed the Duke, had not the Abbot Artuso interposed himself, and joyfully interrupting him said:

“Sirs, for me it is no marvel what we saw tonight with the two swords, because every Pagano has his brain in his beret. But since sleep invites us, let us go I implore you, and if you do not know the way I will go first, as the guide to all.”

