



Kingdom of Lochac
Royal Guild of Defence

Punta Dritta - July 2007

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Meeting of the Royal Guild of Defence

A meeting of the Guild was held at Rowany Festival on Sunday 8 April 2007.

The chief matter for discussion was the large number of members in the guild who, by the ordinances of the guild, have been inactive for the past five years, that is to say, have not taken part in the playing or examining of Prizes. As of late last 2006, of 113 members listed as holding rank, 57 had taken part in Prizes since the creation of the Kingdom of Lochac in July 2002. Obviously, 56 had not. The Provost Secretary's concern was that the ordinances of the Guild be applied appropriately and that those who had not sought to make any contribution to the Guild should be listed as 'inactive'.

After a wide-ranging discussion, the Provost Secretary was asked to provide to the Body of Guildmasters by May Crown a list of those who according to Guild records had not participated in a Prize. This list was published on the Guild web site with a call on the Fencers List and in *Pegasus* for any member named who wished to retain their active status to contact and demonstrate to the Lord Guildmaster the contribution they have made to the Guild. As a result of this process, the Active List has been update and a separate Inactive list now appears on the web site.

The implications of this matter led to a broader discussion about the definitions of 'activity' in

the Guild ordinances, as there are circumstances such as injury, distance, mundane requirements or the availability of Prizes that may affect members' opportunities to contribute. The Body of Guildmasters requested that amendments to the ordinances be drafted for approval. As a result, the ordinances have been amended to state as follows:

It is the responsibility of all members of the Guild to contribute to the practice and promotion of the period arts of defence in Lochac. This includes, but is not limited to, the playing of Guild Prizes, either as candidate or examiner or sponsor, and the teaching of period skills and techniques in rapier and armoured combat. Members who do not actively contribute to the goals of the Guild may be asked by the Lord Guildmaster to demonstrate the service they have provided to the Guild. Members who do not do so shall have all privileges suspended, until such time that the Lord Guildmaster, upon receiving the advice of members of the Body of Guildmasters, is satisfied that the member once again fulfils his or her obligations to the Guild. The Body of Guildmasters reserves unto itself the right to administer further sanctions, up to and including demotion in rank, subject to the final decision of the Lord Guildmaster.

A side issue was a suggestion that the eligibility requirements for advancement in rank (e.g. from Free Scholar to Journeyman or Journeyman to Provost) should include having examined a Prize at level. This was broadly opposed because of the difficulty of finding Prizes to examine, and the very good argument that we should not be making it harder for candidates to seek advancement. However, the involvement of members as examiners wherever possible is actively encouraged, to support growing understanding of how to examine and what a Prize is about. To that end, this issue of *Punta Dritta* includes a reprint of an article from a previous issue about playing the Prize.

An issue raised from the floor was concern about the lack of training provided at Festival during the times set aside to do so. It has been suggested that members of the Guild should start offering actual classes during training time, to be officially listed in the A&S collegia timetable and the Lord Guildmaster will be encouraging members to start thinking about this ahead of the next Festival.

Finally, there was raised the concern about how we encourage more fencers to take part in the Guild. A key point was that too many times there seem to be fencers who might wish to play a Prize, but don't think they can. This falls on every member of the Guild to consider those who are fencing and engaging in armoured combat, and encourage them to look at playing a Prize, both for recognition of their abilities, and in recognition of the fact that playing period techniques will improve their fighting and appearance on the field.

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Reports on Prizes in the Kingdom of Lochac

TO ALL WHO PROFESS SKILL AT ARMS, BE IT KNOWN THAT

Canterbury Faire

On Sunday the Fifth Day of February AS XLI at Canterbury Faire:

Scholar John of Darton, sponsored by Guildmaster ibn Jelal, did play his Free Scholar's Prize in the following weapons: single sword. The candidate was examined by Provost Somerled of Radcliffe, Journeyman Luan an Fael, Journeyman William de Cameron and Free Scholar Maree de Cauty. The examiners did conclude that the Scholar had successfully played the Prize and did acknowledge and elevate him to the rank of Free Scholar.

Free Scholar Martuccio of Southron Gaard, sponsored by Guildmaster ibn Jelal, did play his Journeyman's Prize in the following weapons: Rapier; Rapier and Dagger; and Rapier and Cloak. The candidate was examined by Provost Somerled of Radcliffe, Journeyman Luan an Fael and Journeyman William de Cameron. The examiners did conclude that the Free Scholar had successfully played the Prize and did acknowledge and elevate him to the rank of Free Scholar.

Rowany Festival

On Friday the Sixth Day of April AS XLI at Rowany Festival:

Free Scholar Adair Mac Dermid, sponsored by Provost Owain Cantor ap Hughe, did play his Journeyman's Prize in the following weapons: Rapier; Rapier and Baton; and Rapier and Dagger. The candidate was examined by Journeyman Donncaadh Baillie, Journeyman Emrys Tudur, Journeyman William de Cameron and Guildmaster Silfren the Singer. Following due consideration, his examiners did conclude that the Free Scholar had successfully played the Prize and did acknowledge and elevate him to the rank of Journeyman.

Free Scholar Maree de Cauty, sponsored by Guildmaster ibn Jelal, did play her Journeyman's Prize in the following weapons: Rapier; Rapier and Dagger; and Rapier and Cloak. The candidate was examined by Journeyman Adair Mac Dermid, Journeyman Emrys Tudur, Journeyman Donncaadh Baillie, Journeyman William de Cameron and Provost Owain Cantor ap Hughe. Following due consideration, her examiners did conclude that the Free Scholar had successfully played the Prize and did acknowledge and elevate her to the rank of Journeyman.

Free Scholar Aegidius de Hammo of Rowany, sponsored by Guildmaster Angus Galbraith, did play his Journeyman's Prize in the following weapons: Rapier; Rapier and Dagger; and Rapier and Buckler. The candidate was examined by Journeyman Maree de Cauty, Journeyman Adair Mac Dermid, Journeyman William de Cameron and Guildmaster Silfren the Singer. Following due consideration, his examiners did conclude that the Free Scholar had successfully played the Prize and did acknowledge and elevate him to the rank of Journeyman.

Journeyman Emrys Tudur, sponsored by Guildmaster ibn Jelal, did play his Provost's Prize in the following weapons: Rapier; Rapier and Dagger; Rapier and Cloak; Rapier and Rotella; and Rapier and Baton. The candidate was examined by Provost Owain Cantor ap Hughe, Provost Diccon Shorthand, Provost Gregory Tortouse de Sloleye, Guildmaster Francois Henri Guyon, Guildmaster Caleb Adolphous and Guildmaster Angus Galbraith. His examiners did agree that the Journeyman had most successfully played the Prize and did acknowledge and elevate him to the rank of Provost.

Journeyman Luan an Fael, sponsored by Guildmaster ibn Jelal, did play his Provost's Prize in the following weapons: Rapier; Case of Rapier; Rapier and Dagger; Rapier and Cloak; and Rapier and Baton. The candidate was examined by Provost Owain Cantor ap Hughe, Provost Gregory Tortouse de Sloleye, Guildmaster Angus the Barbarian, Guildmaster Caleb Adolphous, Guildmaster Silfren the Singer and Guildmaster Francois Henri Guyon. Following due consideration, his examiners did conclude that the Journeyman had successfully played the Prize and did acknowledge and elevate him to the rank of Provost.

Journeyman William de Cameron, sponsored by Guildmaster ibn Jelal, did play his Provost's Prize in the following weapons: Rapier; Rapier and Dagger; Rapier and Cloak; Rapier and Rotella; and Rapier and Baton. The candidate was examined by Provost Diccon Shorthand, Provost Owain Cantor ap Hughe, Provost Gregory Tortouse de Sloleye, Provost Alessandro von Florenz, Guildmaster Francois Henri Guyon and Guildmaster Caleb Adolphous. His examiners did agree that the Journeyman had successfully played the Prize and did acknowledge and elevate him to the rank of Provost.

Prize announcements

TO ALL WHO PROFESS SKILL AT ARMS, BE IT KNOWN THAT

Aneala

I, Provost Dona Sabine d'Ricold da Forli, do give leave and licence to our Scholar, Sir Kane

Greymane, to play his Free Scholar's Prize against all Free Scholars, Journeymen, Provosts and Masters in their subtle mystery at these weapons, viz: Rapier. These are to give notice that the said Scholar will be at the Fencing Schola on the 19th-22nd of July, ASXLII, upon the Field, to perform and do their utter most for the achievement and bearing away of the Prize.

I, Provost Dona Sabine d'Ricold da Forli, do give leave and licence to our Scholar, Andre de Montsegur, to play his Free Scholar's Prize against all Free Scholars, Journeymen, Provosts and Masters in their subtle mystery at these weapons, viz: Rapier. These are to give notice that the said Scholar will be at the Fencing Schola on the 19th-22nd of July, ASXLII, upon the Field, to perform and do their utter most for the achievement and bearing away of the Prize.

I, Provost Dona Sabine d'Ricold da Forli, do give leave and licence to our Scholar, Alicia Esperanza, to play his Free Scholar's Prize against all Free Scholars, Journeymen, Provosts and Masters in their subtle mystery at these weapons, viz: Rapier. These are to give notice that the said Scholar will be at the Fencing Schola on the 19th-22nd of July, ASXLII, upon the Field, to perform and do their utter most for the achievement and bearing away of the Prize.

I, Provost Dona Sabine d'Ricold da Forli, do give leave and licence to our Scholar, Walter of St Basil, to play his Free Scholar's Prize against all Free Scholars, Journeymen, Provosts and Masters in their subtle mystery at these weapons, viz: Rapier. These are to give notice that the said Scholar will be at the Fencing Schola on the 19th-22nd of July, ASXLII, upon the Field, to perform and do their utter most for the achievement and bearing away of the Prize.

I, Provost Dona Sabine d'Ricold da Forli, do give leave and licence to our Scholar, Sir Pantera a la Vale, to play his Free Scholar's Prize against all Free Scholars, Journeymen, Provosts and Masters in their subtle mystery at these weapons, viz: Rapier. These are to give notice that the said Scholar will be at the Fencing Schola on the 19th-22nd of July, ASXLII, upon the Field, to perform and do their utter most for the achievement and bearing away of the Prize.

I, Provost Dona Sabine d'Ricold da Forli, do give leave and licence to our Scholar, Laviolas, to play his Free Scholar's Prize against all Free Scholars, Journeymen, Provosts and Masters in their subtle mystery at these weapons, viz: Rapier. These are to give notice that the said Scholar will be at the Fencing Schola on the 19th-22nd of July, ASXLII, upon the Field, to perform and do their utter most for the achievement and bearing away of the Prize.

I, Ancient Guildmaster Don Dameon Greybeard, do give leave and licence to our Journeyman Donnchadh Baillie to play his Provost's Prize against all Provosts and Guild Masters in their subtle mysteries at these weapons, viz: Single Rapier; Rapier and Dagger; Case of Rapier; Rapier and Buckler; and Rapier and Rotella. These letters are to give notice that our Provost will be at the Fencing Schola in the Barony of Aneala on the weekend of the 19th-22nd of July ASXLII, to perform and do his utter most for the achievement and bearing away of the Prize.

River Haven

I, Guild Master Don Henry Fox, do give leave and licence to our Scholar Marcus de la Mancha, to play his Free Scholar's Prize against all Free Scholars, Journeymen, Provosts and Guild Masters in their subtle mystery at these weapons, viz: Rapier. These are to give notice that our said Scholar will be at the Fencing Fest, River Haven on Sunday 5th August ASXLII, to perform and do his utter most for the achievement and bearing away of the Prize.

I, Guild Master Don Henry Fox, do give leave and licence to our Scholar Wulfric Greycloak, to play his Free Scholar's Prize against all Free Scholars, Journeymen, Provosts and Guild Masters in their subtle mystery at these weapons, viz: Rapier and cane. These are to give notice that our said Scholar will be at the Fencing Fest, River Haven on Sunday 5th August ASXLII, to perform and do his uttermost for the achievement and bearing away of the Prize.

I, Guild Master Don Henry Fox, do give leave and licence to our Scholar Wulfgar Strongarm, to play his Free Scholar's Prize against all Free Scholars, Journeymen, Provosts and Guild Masters in their subtle mystery at these weapons, viz: Rapier and cane. These are to give notice that our said Scholar will be at the Fencing Fest, River Haven on Sunday 5th August ASXLII, to perform and do his uttermost for the achievement and bearing away of the Prize.

I, Guild Master Don Henry Fox, do give leave and licence to our Scholar Wulfstan Bloodaxe, to play his Free Scholar's Prize against all Free Scholars, Journeymen, Provosts and Guild Masters in their subtle mystery at these weapons, viz: Rapier. These are to give notice that our said Scholar will be at the Fencing Fest, River Haven on Sunday 5th August ASXLII, to perform and do his uttermost for the achievement and bearing away of the Prize.

I, Guild Master Don Henry Fox, do give leave and licence to our Scholar Orm the Red, to play his Free Scholar's Prize against all Free Scholars, Journeymen, Provosts and Guild Masters in their subtle mystery at these weapons, viz: Rapier. These are to give notice that our said Scholar will be at the Fencing Fest, River Haven on Sunday 5th August ASXLII, to perform and do his uttermost for the achievement and bearing away of the Prize.

I, Provost Somerled of Redcliff, do give leave and licence to our Scholar Emilio de Batista to play his Free Scholar's Prize against all Free Scholars, Journeymen, Provosts and Guild Masters in their subtle mystery at these weapons, viz: Rapier and dagger. These are to give notice that our said Scholar will be at the Fencing Fest, River Haven on Sunday 5th August ASXLII, to perform and do his uttermost for the achievement and bearing away of the Prize.

I, Guildmaster Don Henry Fox, do give leave and licence to our Journeyman Giles Leabrook, to play his Provost's Prize against all Provosts and Guild Masters in their subtle mystery at these weapons, viz: rapier; rapier and dagger; rapier and baton; rapier and buckler; and rapier and parrying gauntlet. These are to give notice that the candidate will be at the Fencing Fest,

River Haven on Sunday 5th August ASXLII, to perform and do his utter most for the achievement and bearing away of the Prize.

LONG LIVE THE CROWN OF LOCHAC!

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Playing the Prize

By Guildmasters Silfren the Singer and ibn Jelal, this article first appeared in *Punta Dritta* in November 2003.

This isn't "The Gospel According To The Guild of Defence", but the thoughts of two Guildmasters, Silfren and ibn Jelal, who played the first prizes in Lochac and have examined many since.

We put these thoughts forward and invite commentary from all.

The Purpose Of Playing The Prize

The Guild of Defence is devoted to research into and teaching of period martial arts.

The playing of the prize is a way in which we measure people's progress in the art of defence, their competency in the use of their weapons and understanding and use of period techniques.

The requirement for ability and accuracy increases as the Guild member goes through the ranks of the guild, with the upper ranks also required to be actively teaching and studying period styles.

The prize is not a competition to see who can land the most touches, it is an examination of the candidate's ability. Examiners present problems to the candidate and give them opportunities to show different techniques in solving those problems.

The Differences Between Ranks

The ideal candidate will have a range of attacks and defences, rather than a single stance or movement of the blade that works for them. They will have a range of footwork, and can show they know when to use each direction and style of pace, even if they use some more than others. They will attack in different lines, and marry those attacks with correct footwork. They will use different defences depending on the opponent's attack, and will demonstrate an

understanding of how to use distance, blade work, voiding, and both hands (empty or no) as part of their response.

There are no hard and fast differences between the ranks. However there are some general concepts which can help us determine performance. Those concepts are ability, which includes speed and efficiency, understanding of actions, and complexity of the fencing phrases. The following examples should give you an idea of how those concepts are applied.

Each rank will have a different level of ability in the same weapon, a Journeyman playing a sword and buckler prize should be a better sword and buckler fighter than a Free Scholar. The higher the rank, the faster the speed - not just physical speed, but speed of reaction, speed of understanding. A Provost will solve problems more quickly than a Journeyman who will solve them faster than a Free Scholar will. The higher the rank, the quicker they should be to see an opening and take advantage of it. Physical speed is athleticism, the Guild is more interested in speed of understanding, and in the level of timing, as well as the efficiency of their actions. The candidates motion should increase in efficiency as they progress through the ranks, which will result in an apparent increase of speed. It's a continuum from the choppy static fight of the Free Scholar, through to flowing seemingly effortless fight of the Guildmaster.

Given something they have never seen before, a Free Scholar would stand back and be unsure of what to do and perhaps be tentative in trying what they know against it. A Journeyman would think "That's different!" but go in and attack it with their best shot. A Provost would probe the new stance or defence carefully, noting reactions. A Guildmaster would look at it, note the possibilities inherent in it, and then manipulate the opponent to expose the weak spots they've seen.

A Free Scholar will use simple attacks, probably only one try per pass. A good one will not stop when the attack has failed, but turn it into another attack, salvaging a missed thrust with a cut. They will be reasonably balanced in their movements, seldom over stepping or over-parrying. They will show competence in the weapons form, including some clear understanding of period style, use of both hands, and some period style footwork. A modern epeeist may score many touches, but would not be suitable as a Free Scholar of the Guild.

A Journeyman will be making two or three attacks, stringing them together, before they retire out of distance. They'll understand ripostes and the rhythm of attack and defence. They should be more settled and cleaner in their movements than the Free Scholar, have a good understanding of range, be more economical in their movements. They should be solidly competent in the use of the chosen weapons form, showing more understanding of how it was used in period, as well as body voids and good footwork.

Provosts will clearly use that attack and defence rhythm, but will control it more, and will be using attack by second intention, where the initial attack sets up the subsequent ones. They

will be using timing well, landing their hits with intelligence more than with speed. The Provost is a teacher, and so must demonstrate good form in their movements. They should be well balanced all the time, upright, their footwork crisp and quick. They should look good, not wild or sloppy. Their blade work should be neat and accurate, economical and well timed. They should show a good understanding of one or more period styles, demonstrating the way the feet and hands work together, as well as many of the possibilities of each weapon they choose.

Guildmasters will do all a Provost does but more so, and will make it seem effortless, unfussed. They will look good in all their movements, and demonstrate a mastery of their weapons, showing several period styles and approaches to problems.

Considerations For When You Examine A Candidate

The examiners should collaborate to be sure the candidate is given every opportunity to demonstrate their ability, they should each concentrate on providing different openings and attacks and defences for the candidate to take advantage of. Their job is to provide an environment for the candidate to show what they can do, not what they can't do. They should be sure to attack as well as wait to be attacked, examine the candidate at several distances, see what they do when confronted with different period style attacks or stances.

It is important to remind everyone involved on the day that this is an examination of style and ability, not a tournament where getting the touch is all that matters.

The maintainers of standards for each rank are the members of that rank. If Guildmasters and Provosts and a single Journeyman are testing a Journeymans's prize, the Journeyman should have the final say, as to whether the candidate is their peer. It is natural for higher ranks to see more faults in a candidate than the lower ranks, however it's the person of the rank being examined who will have a better feel for what is required at that rank. We do not expect skill comparable to a Provost at Free Scholar rank, and higher ranks should make an effort to moderate their expectations and actions to that of the rank being examined.

Considerations For The Candidate

Your job is to demonstrate your style and knowledge. You will be expected to show an understanding of offence and defence in a period style. The concept to remember here is depth and breadth of ability.

One of the sure-fire ways to fail a prize is to concentrate on winning each bout. When candidates have dropped into this mindset, they fall back on their old faithful actions, and have shown a very limited range of actions. What your examiners want to see is your diversity. Some bouts your examiners will give you opportunities to attack and in others they will push your defence.

The job of an examiner is to bring out your skill, which they will do by presenting problems. If you see an examiner presenting the blade, your first thought of making the bind is probably the correct one, as the examiner is most likely giving you an opportunity to show that action. They are giving you a chance to show how you deal with a threatening blade. It's not a tournament, they want you to succeed and are not trying to sucker you into making the wrong action.

Another thing you should remember as candidate is to use the combination you've chosen. It's no good selecting sword and buckler if you don't use the buckler in your fencing. Your examiners want to see you trying to make hand offs, deflections and actions on the blade with the buckler, not just this lump of wood waving vaguely in the direction of the examiner.

Most of all, we want to see you having fun. This is an opportunity to fence for the sake of the art and style. It's not a competition, and there's no pressure on you to win. We want to see you try the stuff you think doesn't work for you reliably, as well as the stuff you're good at. This is the time to show what you know, not just what you know works for you.

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Di Grassi as a foundation for SCA standard rapier

An edited text of a presentation by Provost Owain Cantor ap Hughe to the Combined Guilds Day held in Politarchopolis on 16-17 September 2006.

This discussion is in part a result of the exhortation by several Guildmasters that I start working towards the playing of a Master's Prize, an invitation that I have taken up with a sense of challenge and great trepidation. Further study of Giacomo di Grassi's manual as a first step towards that end was an obvious and natural choice. My first lessons in fencing came from that manual, under the instruction of Guildmaster Francois Henri Guyon. And, while my skills have evolved with practice and further teaching, di Grassi remains the foundation of my rapier style.

Using di Grassi as a foundation for period rapier combat is my subject; specifically, its practical application in introducing beginners to fencing in the SCA as played under the standard rapier combat rules. My views on this subject are drawn from my own experience as a fencing student under various teachers, my reading of di Grassi's work and the SCA rapier rules, and my more recent experience as a teacher of new fencers. Should any fault be found with the interpretation of di Grassi or its application, then such should rest with me, not with my teachers.

Principles of di Grassi

Di Grassi's manual forms part of a body of work that came out of Italy in the mid to late 16th century, attaching scientific principles to the practice of swordplay. The work of the Italian masters through this period also documents the evolution of fencing from a predominantly cutting style to the point-oriented styles of the 17th century onwards. Di Grassi lays out five principles for his True Arte of Defence:

1. The straight line is the shortest.
2. He that is nearest hits soonest.
3. A circle bears more force in its extremity than in the centre.
4. A man may more easily withstand a small force than a great one.
5. Every motion is accomplished in time.

His principles are based upon his discussion of the different parts of the sword, coupled with the different parts of the arm. This has three elements:

- The relative strengths of each part;
 - The speed at which different parts move; and
 - The relationship between the movement of the arm and the movement of the sword.

Di Grassi's principles cover fundamental aspects of period fencing: the importance of distance from your opponent; the use of the weaker (but faster) parts of your sword to attack and the slower (but stronger) parts to parry; and the coordination of parry, riposte and footwork to accomplish your defence and attack in time. His principles also set out a compelling argument for the use of the thrust over the cut.

To make a cut, a sword must travel in a circle; therefore, if your opponent makes a cut, and you make a straight-line thrust, your attack will land first. Taking this further, if your point is closer to your opponent than their edge to you, a straight thrust will be quick enough to incapacitate your opponent, without needing to parry the cut. Di Grassi style is very much about using the point, and the thrust is proposed as his primary attack in all forms. But he is not above using the cut, when circumstances provide the advantage. It is possible to make a cut more quickly, by using the wrist, but because the wrist is at the centre of that circle of motion, it lacks force for a solid attack. But if your edge is closer to your opponent than their point (for example, after an unsuccessful or feinted thrust), then a cut can be landed more quickly, and with sufficient strength, by virtue of being able to use your arm to draw the edge.

Benefits of di Grassi as a foundation for new SCA fencers

There are strong similarities between di Grassi and SCA standard rapier. SCA standard combat allows only two means of landing a blow: a good thrust; and a draw cut. The practical application of this requirement means that the thrust is the primary or, if you prefer, most-used, attack in SCA-regimented bouts. As such, teaching di Grassi's approach of using the thrust in the first instance, with the cut as a follow-up, is a straightforward way of teaching students how to attack according to the SCA rules.

In my re-reading of di Grassi's writings, I have also concluded that his approach also provides a basis to teach a student to attack safely, when it comes to calibration of the thrust. Under the SCA combat rules, a 'good' thrust is considered to be the lightest touch that the combatant can feel. In actual combat, this may not be the case and calibration continues to be a matter for debate, but it should be accepted that, for the purposes of SCA rapier, the aim in training students is not to teach them to run an opponent through, but how to land a firm, but not excessive, touch on their opponent. Di Grassi describes the thrust as the result of two opposing circular motions; for example, from the Low Ward, the point of the sword moves in an arc downwards as the hand and arm moves in an arc upwards, creating a straight line. I consider that this explanation of the movement of the blade can help instil in students the concept that a 'thrust' is actually the motion of reaching out to touch their opponent with an extension of their arm. Combined with training and practice in footwork, balance and distance, this approach may help students refine their thrusting technique and reduce the risk of the 'stabbing' motion that can be seen in less experienced fencers. This will not prevent hard shots from happening - the fencer's technique is only one factor in a sequence that also includes speed, adrenalin and the movement of your opponent - but it will reduce the risk.

My third preference for teaching di Grassi comes down to a very practical issue. Di Grassi is simple; his manual distils a multitude of guards (for example in Marozzo) down to three: the High, Broad and Low Wards. Based on experience, the Low Ward is the natural position a new fencer will take the very first time they pick up a sword. And when it comes to defence, di Grassi is simpler still; his recommended defences against attacks from all wards all start from the Low Ward. His accompanying footwork is also straightforward. Di Grassi's emphasis is on balance and deliberation, making paces, or half paces, in attack or defence that are spaced according to the stature of the combatant. Di Grassi does not advocate the lunge - at most, the 'great pace' is a demi-lunge - and in my own experience, his footwork is ideal for a larger person who may be less fit and more aware of stresses on joints.

Teaching Di Grassi

To train a di Grassi fencer, I, like my own instructors, tend to start from the ground up. The first lessons for new students start with footwork, teaching them how to be balanced and their deliberate in their movements when they advance, withdraw or move around their opponent. It's worth discussing here the question of how soon to introduce students to slope paces, My view is that forwards and backwards are the logical starting point for footwork, but that as soon

as students are comfortable with the stance and basic movements, you should incorporate slope and compass steps into their training regime, particularly once they start bladework.

The bladework itself begins with instruction on establishing and maintaining distance, the stance for di Grassi's wards, their applications and their various pros and cons. Something I have found useful recently in developing these skills is an application of a principle taught to me from Viggiani, emphasising the movements of the blade as transitions from one guard to another. Di Grassi talks about moving the blade from one of his wards to end in another (frequently the Low ward), but I have found Viggiani's description a valuable concept in coming to understand how the wards fit together.

From the fundamental lessons in foot and bladework, we move on to putting them together, developing parries and ripostes and working on movements within time. At this point we start looking at how to apply the knowledge acquired to their opponents, for such elements as estimating their opponent's effective distance, considering possible attacks from their chosen guard and looking for ways around their defence. This is also the stage where I find benefit in working on slope steps, where students can be shown the advantages of stepping off-line to make an angled attack. From here on, it is a case of sharing ideas on attack and defence and building a repertoire of moves, branching out as skills develop into areas such as feints, binds and off-hand forms.

Some of these are elements not entertained, or seriously entertained, in the di Grassi approach. For example, di Grassi is greatly dismissive of feints, or falsing as he calls it, describing it as something more suited to practice, or 'sport', than to the serious business of staying alive in a fight. The difference between di Grassi's approach to fencing, and the skills taught in the SCA, leads me to finish with some philosophical discussion.

Finally, some philosophy...

In preparing for this discussion, I have been re-reading Egerton Castle's book on *Schools and Masters of Fencing*. 120 years after it was first published, it remains an excellent discussion of the evolution of modern fencing. Of course, in reading Castle, it helps if you try to keep to one side his patronising comments about the early fencing masters and the conceited view that by the late 19th century fencing had achieved its perfect state. To take Castle's perspective, swordsmen before the 16th century were essentially brawling thugs with little real skill who relied on having heavier armour and a stronger sword arm than their opponents to carry them through a battle. Even the fencing masters of the Renaissance were rated as men who taught their own collection of 'tricks' while gradually carrying fencing along to a more scientific view. There are some respected and deadly fighters in the SCA today who would surely take issue with this view, and their continuing efforts to develop their skills are in fact taking them back beyond Egerton Castle's starting point, as earlier teachers and manuals help them to better understand how it all works. But rather than be as patronising, and say that we in the SCA

today know more than Castle did, I think it's fairer to say that we have a greater store of knowledge to draw on, with unimagined access to fencing and combat manuals going back centuries.

Consider that a fencing student in the 16th century learned "the true art" from his teacher, including trade secrets that may have come with an injunction not to reveal them to others. At some stage, they might have been fortunate enough to receive instruction from other teachers, or had access to published fencing works. Over time, those who became masters would have refined their thinking into their own style, and passed this on as the "true art". By comparison, to learn 16th century fencing in the SCA, you can sit at a desk and within minutes have access to manuals from a handful of masters, from different countries, espousing different approaches, in the original, in translation or, best of all, interpreted by another fencer who has put in the effort to work out what the master meant in modern terms. As a result, the SCA fencer can develop an armoury of fencing technique that crosses the styles of various masters; indeed, we are encouraged to do so in the Guild of Defence, where Prizes at the senior levels are judged in part upon a candidate's ability to play in more than one style.

Our approach to fencing, and the great knowledge we have at our disposal, does present challenges. As we adopt, and adapt, the old masters' styles to our own needs students have to be conscious of not learning so much that our fencing style truly does become nothing more than a collection of 'tricks' picked up here and there. A system can be enhanced, or it can work in concert with another system, but it must remain a coherent system.

Masters and teachers, on the other hand, must remain aware of the needs of their students. It is possible, and practical, to become a competent and effective fencer employing the teachings of a single master. Employing the teachings of more than one master can certainly enhance fencing ability, but we risk overloading students if we draw on the range of resources at our command and seek to push them too far, too soon.

References:

Castle, Egerton, *Schools and Masters of Fencing*, Dover Publications, 2003

Hutton, Alfred, *Old Sword Play*, Dover Publications, 2002

There are many excellent Internet sites that cover di Grassi's work, notably:

www.musketeer.org/manuals/diGrassi/contents.htm

www.kismeta.com/diGrasse/

<http://www.aemma.org/onlineResources/diGrassi/digrassiHome.htm> (you must be a member to use this site)

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Rapier Training Guide ~ Part II

By Provost Piers of Malmesbury

In the previous issue, Provost Piers outlined the first two lessons in a program to help the student combatant train towards basic authorisation in rapier in Lochac.

Lesson 3 covers alternate grips, offline attacks, disengages, trades and parry-riposte motions.

Lesson 3:

Revise briefly lessons 1 and 2 for about 10 to 15 minutes. Use this as a warm up.

Alternate Grips

The grip described in lesson 1 is by far the most common, however there was no particular restriction on grips. Use whatever works. Three of the more usual variations are given here.

Firstly, instead of wrapping your index finger around the ricasso and quillons, extend it along the back of the blade. This means that when you thrust at an opponent you are pointing an extended 'finger' at them. It is weaker in all lateral motions and parries, but can add power and control to a thrust, especially a thrust directed downwards. Most commonly held in *seconda*. It will also alter the line of a thrust as compared with the standard grip, although not by much.

Second, wrap your fingers around the grip, with no finger over the quillons or ricasso (a fist) then extend your thumb along the flat of the blade (a 'thumbs up' grip). This is a very solid grip for warding attacks below the waist and allows for very powerful attacks from the high ward in *prima*. It is weaker against lateral pressure, so is not good for any cutting attacks.

A variant of this is to grip the sword near the pommel, so the thumb is extended along the grip, not the blade. All advantages and disadvantages are the same, however you sneak a few centimetres more length.

Finally, sit the pommel in the palm of your hand and wrap the last two fingers around it. The thumb is extended along the grip (on the edge side this time, not the flat), and the other two fingers hold loosely to control the weapon. This gives an extended grip (maximum length forward) and is quite comfortable to hold in *quarta*. It also enables a high ward to be held in

seconda.

Off line Attacks

An off line attack is any attack which is delivered from a line not to your front. A simple example is a thrust from the broad ward.

An example of an offline thrust. Stand in low ward, but allow your point to drop until it is facing your trainee's right shin or foot. Your off hand should be in a chest ward, but low, near your belt. You are inviting a thrust to the chest or face. The trainee thrusts slowly at your chest. Bring your sword up into broad ward position at the same time as you make a slope pace forward to the left. Your off hand may come up behind your blade to add strength and control to your parry as you collect your trainee's blade and push it aside (half-swording). At the end of this motion you will likely be standing almost at right angles to your trainee with your sword held almost parallel to your shoulders with both hands (the off hand on the blade), and the trainee's blade held out. From here you use the strength of your position to slide the point of your sword into the trainee. Almost any voiding step they make can be followed from this position, usually with a lunge.

Being able to attack off line is very useful, however it is important to remember that when your sword is off line, it isn't protecting you. This places greater 'responsibility' on the off hand. Remember that the off hand can't reach as far as a sword, and this will impact on 'measure'.

Parry, riposte

The modern interpretation of parry riposte is not present in period manuals as it implies two separate actions. Technically, a riposte is an attack from the ward or parry, rather than an attack after a successful defence. The difference is more than one of semantics, if you successfully beat (hard parry) a thrust and come back on guard, then seeing that your opponent is still out of position you thrust, you may not be under direct threat but they are still free to parry, and because you have taken an indirect route to the attack (from parry to guard to thrust), they have a good chance of success. Di Grassi's comment that "every motion takes time", and that he who is closer hits sooner gain their true meaning here.

Despite this, the motions themselves do form an integral part of period rapier practice. The difference is that in period the 'displacing' motion (parry) is part of the preparation for the actual counter-attack. This may seem like so much 'double talk', but it is different to the modern fencing understanding of the term.

A parry/riposte of the above situation would be to beat the thrust aside, and from your gained position (remember lesson one, in executing the parry the hind foot comes forward half a pace) thrust directly from there. Your sword point, being on the inside line, is closer to your opponent

than theirs is to you. You have the advantage of position AND of time. You don't need to come back on guard if they are not in position to attack. If you aren't sure, you can always interpose your hand in a 'warding' motion.

Practice hard parries and ripostes from ward. If possible, try to use all seven of the wards as described in lesson 1. The reason for this is that the position of the hand (pronation, supination) determines the range of motion your hand can make from the position it ends up in. Then, to be thorough (or mean), do them left-handed. Hard parries used this way are best supported by passing off to the off-hand. Once the sword has been knocked aside, keep it out of line by having your open hand between you and the blade.

Now do it all again with soft parries. This is where hand position makes a real difference. To demonstrate; have someone make a slow thrust at your left hip while you stand in guard (offensive). Slowly soft parry the thrust in *prima* (with the thumb down). Having engaged the blade, what are your options?

- 1) Pass off to the off hand, recover your weapon. The straightest line for your sword is a thrust at the foot or a draw cut of their sword arm. The void motion is a straight pace.
- 2) Circular parry to carry their blade around you to your right side, outside the line of your body. Void pace is a slope pace left. You can stop when the blade reaches *terza* or *quarta* where you drop the point and thrust at their face, pushing your sword hand over theirs (and thus pushing their sword up), or
- 3) Continue the circle until you reach the low ward or push out to the broad ward position and thrust in as above, keeping their sword outside your line.

(Don't let them get ahead of you here... of course they can pass off and counter parry and get very messy... leave that for the practice bouts)

Now try the same exercise again, but this time, parry the low thrust in *quarta*. You'll notice that the circular parry won't work, as your wrist won't turn that way. Instead, thrust from that position at their belt line, holding their sword outside the line so it can't hit you. (an off line attack). This time the first preferred void is a slope pace left as it will help bring the sword on line.

While this may seem to encourage a separation of actions between defence and attack, it is only to demonstrate in an exaggerated manner the ideal method of attack. Later, as the trainee gains experience, coach them towards blending the two into a single motion, such that their attack incorporates a parry (ward) and so protects while attacking.

Disengages and Trades

Like the parry/riposte, a disengage is not a period move 'in isolation'. It isn't really the same as a trade, although the actual physical motions are almost identical. The difference is mainly in the tactical application. A disengage is where you perform a motion designed to avoid contact between the blades. In short, where an opponent seeks to 'engage' your blade through a soft parry or hard parry (to knock your weapon off line), you avoid that contact by moving your sword out of the path of their motion, then bringing your point immediately back to position. A trade, which is probably the closest period equivalent, is where you move your blade from the inside line to the outside, or vice versa. While it may sound like the same thing, the difference is that a disengage is largely a separate defensive or preparatory move prior to an attack, whereas the trade is the opening move of a counter, whether that be an attack or a void.

There are two types of disengage, a circular and a vertical.

The vertical disengage is a simple flick; from the low ward position, where the point is aimed slightly up at the opponent's face, should they try to move your blade aside by moving hand or sword across your line, simply drop the point to let the attempt move over, then quickly lift it back up to position. (e.g. you are in low ward. Opponent attempt to engage your blade by making a lateral parry from low ward to 4/Quarte. You perform a vertical disengage, down then back up, letting the tip come back up. You may attempt a thrust from here, but I'd recommend taking a broad ward approach and attacking off line, as this will keep their sword out of the way)

The circular parry is a circular motion of the tip following the line of the opponent's attempt to engage. To explain; in the circumstance given above, an engage from low ward to quarte, a circular disengage would have to roll clockwise and down, to pass under the opponent's blade and come back to position. If they perform an engaging move back, your circular disengage would be counter-clockwise and down, passing under and coming back to position on the other side.

If you gain the place of your opponent after a disengage, you may attack. How this differs from a trade is that the trade is made as a part of the void action to keep the sword free and to establish a new line. An example of a trade is while standing in low ward (sword held in *terza*, if a thrust is made to your chest you may either slip pace forward with the left foot, bringing it behind the right, and at the same time rolling your sword hand out into *seconda*. This makes the sword follow a corkscrew path to the target, effecting a disengage motion at the same time it establishes an offline attack. The alternate move is to slope pace left, rolling the hand into a thrust from *quarta* as you move. This effects a circular disengage to the right, avoids the enemy sword and allows a new direct line to be established.

A trade must be accompanied by a void motion with the feet to avoid counters from your opponent. The trade was called *cavazione*.

Exercises, lesson 3

For this lesson, encourage experimentation with the alternate grips, and run through some simple encounter drills that will encourage movement and allow the trainee to start stringing together elements. Aim for a fluid assembly of motions into a sequence, and try to ease them out of any tendency to do one motion then stop or return to guard. Any time they end up locked in a wrestling match is a failed attempt (for both). The aim is to stay mobile and to have options!

Lesson 4 will cover judgement and tempo, fighting from the ground and a grounded opponent, and parrying gauntlets.

Lesson 4:

Briefly revise lesson 3 and use as a warm up for 10 minutes or so.

Judgement

This is a difficult topic for many trainees as it can be viewed as very academic. There is a tendency amongst beginners to seek 'linear solutions' (if they do this, you do this), but the options are much broader than that, and the decision as to which option you take is largely determined by judgement. Tempo is one of the major deciding factors in judgement. Most people equate tempo with a 'beat' or 'rhythm', but it is actually a 'time segment'. In fencing, an attack 'in tempo' means that you have time to make your move and safely withdraw before your opponent can effectively counter. To do this requires gaining the better position of your opponent (the 'place') and being ready to take advantage of that position. To my mind, the clearest holistic expression of judgement and tempo is given by George Silver in his "four grounds":

"The four grounds or principals of that true fight at all manner of weapons are these four, viz. 1. judgment, 2. distance, 3. time, 4. place.

The reason whereof these four grounds or principals be the first and chief, are the following, because through judgment, you keep your distance, through distance you take your time, through time you safely win or gain the place of your adversary, the place being won or gained you have time safely either to strike, thrust, ward, close, grip, slip or go back, in which time your enemy is disappointed to hurt you, or to defend himself, by reason that he has lost his place, the reason that he has lost his true place is by the length of time through the numbering of his feet, to which he is out of necessity driven to that will be agent.

The 4 governors are those that follow

1. The first governor is judgment which is to know when your adversary can reach you, and when not, and when you can do the like to him, and to know by the goodness or

badness of his lying, what he can do, and when and how he can perform it.

2. The second governor is measure. Measure is the better to know how to make your space true to defend yourself, or to offend your enemy.

3. 4. The third and fourth governors are a twofold mind when you press in on your enemy, for as you have a mind to go forward, so must you have at that instant a mind to fly backward upon any action that shall be offered or done by your adversary. " *George Silver*

To follow this through; the first ground is judgement, or through observation and experience you know what your opponent's range is, and what yours is. With this knowledge you keep your 'distance'. This doesn't mean you stay out of range, but means you may have the 'measure' of your opponent (*misura larga, misura stretta*, etc.). Distance allows you to 'control time', in that you know how long certain actions will take from this measure. This is the first key reference to tempo. The second reference is in the fourth ground of 'place', which is the gaining of a positional advantage over your opponent. Gaining such an advantage is easy, doing so with you sword free and ready to strike is much harder.

The four governors that moderate the four grounds are all facets of tempo, in that they are the 'reality check' for potential and possibilities. Do you actually have time to pull off that fancy move?

To practice this and explain it further to trainees, have them do some hypotheticals in slow work. Face them off, and have each one make a single move in turn. The opponent may counter as they see fit. From each position, let them decide what they would do or try as an option. Keep the exercises to simple passes, because they have to remember them. Have them go through it again at pace to see if they can really manage it. Of course it's harder when the opponent knows what's coming, but it can still serve as a useful illustration.

Fighting from the ground and Fighting a grounded opponent

The major cause of difficulty in fighting a person who is grounded is brought about by simple dynamics. Most people find it easier to fight with the sword angled upwards in their grip, so most attacks will be above the waist (especially with beginners). When an opponent is grounded, all attacks will be initiated from below waist level, so the standing person, in defending themselves, will need greater reliance on their ability to ward their legs, hips and stomach area. The most common ward has the sword in *terza*, which is the least suitable for warding low attacks. *Prima, seconda* and *quarta* are all far more capable in this area.

An added complication is the altered geometry of the swords. With two standing fighters, the crossing of swords is quite easy. With one fighter grounded, the swords are very close to parallel, so warding with crossed swords is more difficult. As the grounded fighter is unable to void, their options for defence become quite impaired.

A grounded fighter is also closer to the lethal targets of their opponent than the standing fighter is to theirs. This can be simply demonstrated by having one fighter grounded and, using equal length swords, have them extend arm and shoulder in a full thrust (without leaning forward) towards belt height. Have a standing fighter approach until the grounded fighter's sword touches their belt, then have them extend their sword in an arc to see what they can reach. In most cases they will be lucky to score a touch on the face, which should be the closest lethal target.

The final complication is that a grounded fighter still has use of the off hand for parrying, while the standing fighter in most cases will not be able to do the same. To make matters worse, it is very risky to attempt a ward against a low line attack and 'pass off' to the offhand as it will almost inevitably require the standing person leaning forward, where the grounded person may disengage/trade and thrust at the face that is now so invitingly close. The unfortunate truth is that against an inexperienced fighter, being grounded has tactical advantages.

So what to tell the trainee? From a standing position against a grounded opponent, let them adopt a standard low ward with the sword in *terza*, in the *Misura Larga* measure (see lesson 1). From this position they extend their arm and drop the tip along the inside line (staying to the right of their opponent's sword) then 'trade' into either *prima* or *quarta*. If they chose *prima*, they should bring the left foot straight up behind their right, rotating their body slightly to the left, which should interpose their sword with their grounded opponent's. From here they may thrust downwards, using a short step with the right foot if needed, maintaining the pressure on the opponent's sword and keeping it offline. If they chose *quarta*, the left foot moves through a slope pace left and forward, again engaging the opponent's sword and allowing a thrust from position. These are two simple options to demonstrate the mechanics of the altered positions, enough to get them over the "I don't know what to do" stage.

If they are grounded, they cannot move. This places much greater emphasis on defence with sword and hand. As the opponent is likely to want to tie up their sword (given the greater reach to lethal targets for the grounded person), hand parries or rapid passing off and trading is the order of the day. For a beginner, being the grounded one is usually easier than being the standing one.

Parrying gauntlet

The parrying gauntlet allows a safer control of an opponent's blade using the offhand, compared with an open hand. A fencer may be more proactive when using this equipment, interposing the hand between themselves and the opponent's blade as a small shield. In many respects, the parrying gauntlet is an ideal primer for buckler use later on. Encourage the use of backhand motions with the gauntlet as this allows more freedom of motion and discourages the trainee from becoming fixated on 'catching' the blade, although an open hand pass to the left side will make a recovery more difficult for the opponent. Simply run through several

parrying exercises again but this time use the gauntlet (or assume there is one for training purposes).

Final

After all this, the trainee should be capable of undertaking full bouts with a good working knowledge of safe weapon usage, basic advances, retreats, stance changes and lunges, parries by rapier and by offhand, proper use of distance and voids, have an ability to attack using thrust and cuts, have proper calibration of thrust and cuts, right and left handed. They will also be able to fight from the ground, and fight someone who is grounded, respond properly to a hold and demonstrate knowledge of the difference between offhand parries with and without a parrying gauntlet. In other words, if they have a working knowledge of the rules and equipment and armour standards, they should be able to pass an authorisation test.

At this point, allow a series of practice bouts as preparation for that test. Things to look for are reactions to a hold, how they take hits, whether they are able to control the weapon in a tourney situation. Some marshals in Lochac especially seek to press the trainee with very fast and aggressive attacks to see what the trainee's first reaction is under pressure. The idea is to see whether the trainee's first instinct is to lash out in self defence. This is not a desirable response. Hiding, running away, or ideally fighting back and countering are all fine. The key is safety. As long as they can meet the requirements of authorisation as laid out, and are not a threat to the safety of themselves or anyone else, they should pass.

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