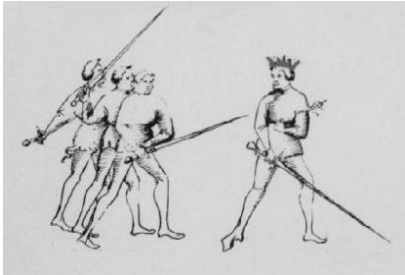
FIORE DEI LIBERI

GETTY TRANSLATION **MORGAN TRANSLATION**

FIORE FORUM



Most of what we know about Fiore dei Liberi comes from the prologues of the different versions of his treatise, *Fior di Battaglia* ('Flower of Battle', also known as *Flos Duellatorum*), and the works of the early 20thC historians Francesco Novati and Luigi Zanutto (who drew on earlier works by Fontanini and others).

Fiore, the treatises

There are four known surviving versions of his treatise:

1) 'Pisani-Dossi' (PD) - dated to 1409 (1410 by the modern calendar), known at the moment from the facsimile in Francesco Novati's work of 1902. It has been widely reproduced on the internet (as Novati's facsimile is out of copyright) and most of the text accompanying the lessons is in the form of short rhyming couplets. It's prologue has two parts, a Latin one and an Italian one, the former part of this being quite different to the prologues of the oth two versions of Fiore's work. It is dedicated to Niccolo III d'Este, Marquis of Ferrara. The armour shown in the treatise may point to a slightly later date than the other two versions (also, in PD it says Fiore studied for years plus, while in Getty and Morgan it says he has studied for 40 years plus). It has some parts not included in the other two versions. Until recently the original was assumed to have been lost, but it is no known where the manuscript is kept (in a private collection). Novati described PD as being unbound and covered with a cardboard folder with a marbled paper cover.

2) 'Getty' - kept in the J.P.Getty Museum in Los Angeles (83.MR.183 (MS LUDWIG XV 13)), it measures 28cm by 20.5cm. It is un-dated (we assume it to be earlier than PD), but is the most extensive of the versions, with more substantial and explanatory text than the PD version. It is also dedicated to Niccolo d'Este, Marquis of Ferrara. This is the version we mostly work from in Schola Gladiatoria.

Known ownership history compiled by Matt Galas:

Niccolo Marcello di Santa Marina, Venice
Apostolo Zeno (1668-1750)
Luigi Celotti (c. 1789-c.1846) {sale, Sotheby's, 1825}
Thomas Phillipps, Ms. 4204 (sale, Sotheby's,1966)
Peter and Irene Ludwig, Aachen, Germany
Getty Collection (current location)

Both PD and Getty describe Niccolo III as Signor of Parma and Reggio - he was only officially recognise Signor of these cities from 1409 until 1421. However, the matter is more complicated, as he laid claim to these cities from around 1404 onwards and received Papal support in his claim. Despite this, on paper is would therefore seem that both PD and Getty date to 1409 or after.

3) 'Morgan' - kept in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York. It is also undated, and unlike the other versions does not have a dedication to Niccolo III d'Este. It has a similar prologue to the Getty version, though not exactly the same, and as a treatise is shorter and with a different structure, starting with th mounted lessons. The plays that it does show have very similar accompanying text to the Getty version. It

has some other peculiarities, like showing the armoured sword lessons out of armour. The artistic sty somewhat similar to Getty and it would appear to be approximately about the same date as Getty, which w take to be before 1410.

Known ownership history compiled by Matt Galas:

Giacomo Soranzo (date?)
Matteo Luigi Canonici, 1727-1805
Walter Sneyd, 809-1888
J. Pierpont Morgan, (John Pierpont), 1837-1913
J. P. Morgan, (John Pierpont), 1867-1943

4) Florius 'De Arte Luctandi' - held by the Bibliothèque Nationale de France as MS LATIN 11269. This treatise was previously unknowr Fiore researchers and came to light in the middle of 2008 thanks to the efforts of Fabrice Cognot a Mondschein. It is written entirely in Latin. It lacks a prologue, but is titled in 17thC script on some pages which were added presumably when it entered the Bibliothèque du Roi (it was in the library of Louis Phélypea marquis de Pontchartrain previous to that). It is a shorter treatise than PD or Getty. It contains plays which are found in the other versions and does not seem to contain any new material - there is a lot of material from PD and Getty not included. It is brightly coloured throughout and the art is of a very high quality and cost. does seem to contain some artistic errors - for example Posta Fenestra with the weapon placed behind th head instead of in front of it. Dating of the manuscript is uncertain, but from the armour and clothes it appears to be a little later than the others, perhaps by a few years, but not more.

It shares a lot of common features with Filippo Vadi's work - especially the artistic arrangement. In fa similarities are so great that one is compelled to suggest that either this was the inspiration for Vadi's work, or they share a common inspiration. Vadi clearly had access to one of Fiore's prologues, yet this version does not have a prologue (though it may have done once).

Other copies?

The inventories of the Estense Library show that there were two copies of Fiore's treatise (Ms.84 and Ms.110) held there between 1436 and 1508 (and presumably before this, as the 1436 inventory was the earliest available to Novati). In addition to these two there is also an anonymous fighting treatise recorded a the same time. After the 1508 inventory these three manuscripts are not recorded in the collection again a have disappeared from the collection. Judging by the catalogue details, it seems unlikely that any of the known surviving copies were either of these two copies of *Fior di Battaglia*. The details do not match any of the versions we know about today exactly. Here are the descriptions of the two manuscripts which were in the Estense library 1436-1508, as taken from Novati:

- Ms. 84: 58 Folios. First page shows a white eagle and two helmets. Bound in leather with a clasp.

- Ms. 110: 15 Folios. Parchment, small format, written in 2 columns, unbound.

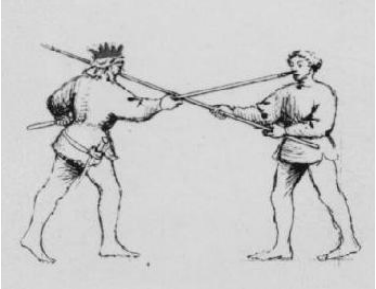
Thus it may be that there were at least six copies of Fior di Battaglia made - assuming none of the four w know of now were either of the two in the Estense library.

Fiore, the man

According to the Getty prologue, Fiore was the son of Benedetto dei Liberi, a noble whose estates were based in Premariacco, a small town in the region of Friuli (north-east Italy). We do not know his birth date, but it must have been some time in the middle of the 14thC, probably in the 1350's (because of the length he gives for his career and the assumed dates of the treatises).

In his treatises Fiore tells us that at an early age he decided he wanted to learn more of martial skills, an began training and ultimately fighting in the barriers ('*in sbarra*'). He tells us that he travelled to learn the art further, and that he learnt from Italian and German masters (in the Pisani-Dossi version two are named Master Giovanni, called Suveno and Master Nicholai of Toblem, of the diocese of Metz). He says he travelled in different lands (regions) and studied under, and later taught, many people. We don't know travelled outside the borders of modern Italy, and all of the proven records of his location are south of birthplace (though this does not preclude the possibility that he crossed the Alps).

Friuli had strong ties with Austria and parts of Germany, and the historians Novati (1902) and Zanutto (showed in their research that the region had been emigrated to by '*Tedeschi*' (Germans) over two centuries at least. Some of these *'Tedeschi'* were listed as '*schermistor*' (fencers). So, whether Fiore learnt from *Tedeschi* in northern Italy, or in Germany, we cannot be sure until further research becomes available.

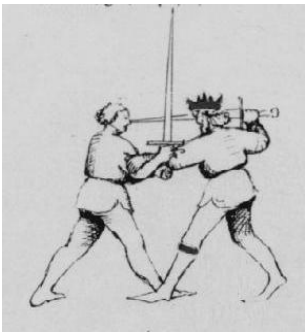


Fiore seems to have gained a reputation for himself, and in the late 14thC he is recorded as performing several duties and as being in various parts of northern Italy. He is not recorded being in Austria or Germany as far as we, Novati or Zanutto can/could tell. A 'Master Fiore' is recorded as fighting for the alliance of towns in Udine in 1383 (there was a kind of civil war in the region, brought about by the accession of a new Patriarch of Aquilegia) against the Patriarch, as a kind of captain, where he is recorded as being put in charge of crossbowmen and/or giant crossbow artillery, as well as being given the responsibility of procurin gunpowder artillery for the defence of the allied towns. There is now a street named after Fiore in Premariacco. In 1395 he is recorded in Padua, and in 1399 in Pavia.

Novati and particularly Zanutto surmise that finally, as a man of reasonable age (maybe in the year 1399 1400), he entered the service of Niccolo III d'Este, the Marchese (Marquis) of Ferrara, Lord of Parma, Reggio etc, head of one of the richest and most famous families in Italy at the time (and enemies of the Visconti family, then-rulers of Milan until a truce in 1404). Zanutto goes as far as to suggest that perhaps Fiore was Niccolo's trainer for his 1399 passage of arms, when Niccolo was 16 years old and had to fac contest against 12 swordsmen. In fact there is no solid evidence to place Fiore at the court of Niccolo d'E other than the two dedications to Niccolo in Getty and PD, and the fact that the Estense (d'Este) library record two copies of *Fior di Battaglia* being present in the collection between the 1436 and 1508 catalogues, after which time these two manuscripts evidently left the collection.

We could assume that Fiore was based at Niccolo's court, but aside from the treatise dedications there evidence to support it and Fiore is not recorded anywhere as being at the court of Ferrara, whilst ma individuals who were present at Niccolo's court are recorded as being there. We therefore cannot neglect the possibility that Fiore was not based at the d'Este court, and maybe dedicated a treatise to Niccolo for som other reason, now lost to us, or that maybe he passed through Niccolo's court for a brief time. I sugg possibility that Fiore was actually based at the court of Milan, due to the names he gives of men he taug (being mostly associated with Milan), and the fact that he assisted at combats in the presence of the Duke and Duchess of Milan. If he was in fact aligned to Milan, then it is possible that his treatises were dedicated to Niccolo d'Este as diplomatic gifts when Milan and Ferrara made a truce in 1404. In PD and Getty Nic described as 'Signor of Parma and Reggio' - a title he did not officially receive until 1409.

The lack of dedication in the Morgan version raises some interesting questions. Note that in Getty he says has organised the treatise (starting with wrestling) according to the wishes of his patron, and this order i shared by PD (which is also dedicated to Niccolo). Whereas in Morgan he says he has organised the according to his own intelligence (starting with mounted fighting) and in De Arte Luctandi this order is shar This suggests that Fiore must have had fairly explicit instructions from Niccolo about how to arrange th treatise.



During his time as a teacher, Fiore tells us he prepared gentlemen, under oath of secrecy, for duels in barriers, and he recites a few of the most notable examples, telling us his student's name, their opponent name and nationality, where the fight was held and what the outcome was.

Fiore names as his students Piero del Verde (a German), Niccolo (Waz)ianlino? (a German), the fa condottiere Galeazzo da Mantova, Capitani da Grumello (an Italian), Lancilotto Beccaria of Pavia (an Giannino da Bavo of Milan (an Italian) and Azzone (Francesco) da Castelbarco (an Italian). For most of

these it is possible to find biographies, and they were amongst some of the most important nobles of their day, some of them being at the forefront of contemporary Italian politics (see Beccaria's attempte assassination coup for example, or Galeazzo's many adventures as a mercenary captain). The same can said of some of Fiore's students' opponents also, for example Giovanni di Ordilaffi who Fiore says fougl against his student Azzone (Francesco) da Castelbarco. Ordilaffi was a major player in north Italian politics of this time, and was an experienced military leader, though he is perhaps most famous for his defe Castagnaro in 1387 while leading the armies of Verona, at the hands of the illustrious English Captain, Sir John Hawkwood (known as Giovanni Acuto in Italy), who was commanding a multi-national force includ English and German mercenaries on behalf of Padua, for his Florentine employers.

Fiore gives the names of seven opponents for his six students (two duels being listed for Azzone da Castelbarco) . Three are Germans, one of them being an identifiable historical person (Piero della Corona), another is a well-known Italian noble (Giovanni di Ordilaffi), one is possibly an Englishman (Nicolo Inghileso, this name meaning 'English'), another is possibly identified with a known English nobleman (Giacomo da Boson) and there is also a Frenchman: 'Messer Buzichardo de Fraza', who we now think was probably Jean le Maingre, 'Boucicaut', Marshal of the armies of France, and for a time Governor of Genoa, captured on Crusade at Nicopolis in 1396 and ransomed, later general at the Battle of Agincourt and captured by the English. Boucicaut was one of the most famous and celebrated knights and generals of the late-14th and early-15thC's, yet he was beaten twice in single combat by one of Fiore's students (Galeazzo da Mantova).

Shown to the right is an illuminated page showing Marshal Boucicaut in the book of hours he commissioned - this now resides in the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris. He wears typical armour of the beginning of the 15thC, with a great bascinet, a longsword and rondel dagger. (click to enlarge)

This international cast should not be surprising to the historian, as many nobles from across Europe a recorded as having travelled to northern Italy to fight knightly duels and tournaments (which were forbidden in many other places), and Austrian, Bohemian, English, French, German, Hungarian and Spanish milita influence are well documented in Italy during the 14th and 15thC's, with such famous figures as the mercenary Captain Sir John Hawkwood (whose monument painted by Paulo Uccello still stands in the Duomo cathedral in Florence) and Boucicaut playing important roles in late 14thC Italian history. Northern Italy was literally awash with mercenary companies, containing soldiers from France and England (magnifiec by the temporary peace between those countries of 1360), and from countries with shared borders anc heritage with northern Italy (Germany and Austria being primary).

This is one subject in my published article (ISBN 0954163311).

The prologues tells us that Fiore himself had to fight five duels against other masters, not wearing armour, but instead only an arming jacket and gloves. He tells us that he would prefer to fight three armoured duels the barriers rather than just one of these un-armoured duels.

Unfortunately we are not sure exactly when Fiore died - possibly between 1410 and 1420.

The legacy of his treatise lived on after his death however, as other fencing masters drew upon his knowledge in their own combat treatises - this can be seen in Filippo Vadi's treatise of about 1485 and also in that of Ludwig von Eyb, a 16thC German General. We can also see that there was some kind of share tradition between Fiore's art and other Masters, with some common names for guards (eg. Iron Door, Long Tail Guard etc), common names for attacks and even named techniques.

To see parts of our English translation to the Getty and Morgan versions of *Fior di Battaglia* and further articles and research here.

Written and updated by Matt Easton.

Contact: schola-gladiatoria@hotmail.co.uk

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