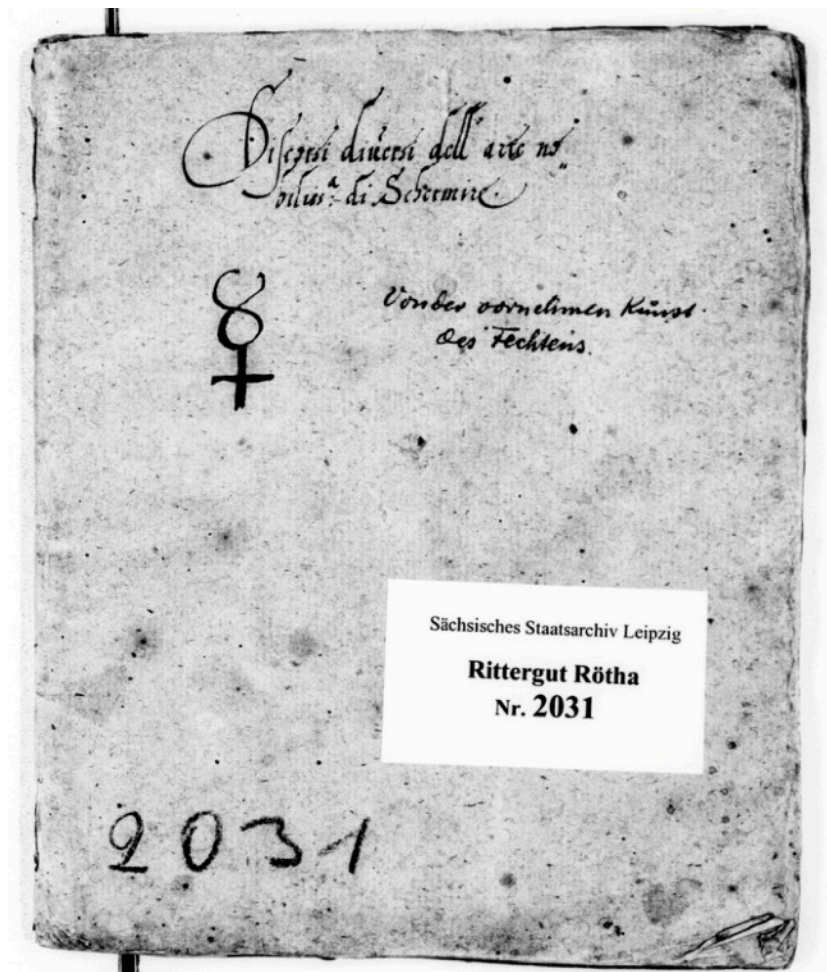




Various Discourses on the Most Noble Art of Fencing



MS 2031: Introduction, Transcription
and Translation (Free)

Guy Windsor

Copyright Notice

The transcription and the English translation by Guy Windsor are licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence (CC BY 4.0). You are free to share, reproduce, adapt, translate, and use this material for any purpose, including commercially, provided appropriate credit is given. The analysis and interpretive work by Guy Windsor is under copyright protection.

The scans have been lightly enhanced for legibility by Guy Windsor, but remain in the public domain. You may use them for any purpose whatsoever.

Acknowledgements and credits

This work owes its existence to Chris Vanslambrouck, who discovered MS 2031 in the Sächsisches Staatsarchiv and made his transcription available to researchers. He also contacted me personally to make sure I was aware of the discovery. My own transcription began from Chris's work and was subsequently checked and revised throughout against the manuscript images. I am also grateful to the Sächsisches Staatsarchiv for preserving the manuscript and making the images available. My fencing friends Dave Smith, Dave Kirkby, Tim Baker, and Iain Brown.

Copyright Notice	2
Acknowledgements and credits	2
Introduction	6
Transcription Notes	7
Translation notes	9
Transcription and Translation Side by Side	10
Transcription, Translation, and Analysis, line by line	20
Cover Page	21
Section 1: Introduction and Theory	22
Plays of Prima	25
Prima, approach on the outside. Plays 1 and 2	25
Prima, approach on the inside. Plays 3 and 4	27
Prima, inside: opponent parries; pass in quarta to the flank. Play 5	29
Plays of Seconda	31
Plays of Terza	32
Stringer on the outside: opponent disengages. Play 11	32
Stringer on the outside: opponent closes the line. Plays 12-14	33
Stringer on the outside: opponent disengages while retreating. Play 15	35
Stringer on the inside: opponent enters in seconda. Play 16	38
Stringer on the inside: opponent lowers the sword to avoid being found. Play 17	39

Stringer on the inside: opponent opposes your blade. Play 18	40
Stringer on the inside: opponent disengages to strike outside. Play 19	41
Stringer on the inside: opponent withdraws with a pass and “changes”. Play 20	42
Stringer on the inside: opponent withdraws with a pass and stops. Play 21	43
Stringer on the inside; feint in quarta; change to seconda. Plays 22 and 23	44
Stringer on the outside: opponent disengages to find your sword. Play 24	45
Stringer on the outside: opponent disengages to free the sword. Play 25	46
Opponent finds your sword on the outside while you are in terza. Play 26	47
Outside engagement: opponent remains; narrow measure. Play 27	48
Narrowing measure: opponent raises the hand to parry. Play 28	49
Both in terza: you are outside and weaker. Play 29	50
After yielding: opponent closes rather than entering. Play 30	51
Opponent closes strong against weak with point to your face. Play 31	52
After yielding: opponent strikes in seconda beneath. Play 32	53
Lowering the point: they enter. Play 33	54
Lowering the point: they cover it. Play 34	55
Terza with point low: enemy begins to cover in distant measure. Plays 35-37	56
Enemy is low: cover, counter-disengage, and re-disengage. Plays 38-40	58
Covering the enemy: they feint. Play 41	60
Your feint: opponent parries outside or beats with the hand. Plays 42 and 43	61
Closing inscription	63
Analysis of the Plays as a Whole	64
MS 2031 in its Fencing Context: Comparison with Fabris, Giganti, Capoferro and Alfieri	66
Appendix 1: Linguistic Analysis of MS 2031 with Salvatore Fabris	69

1. 1r-2r: General principles; four guards; wide and close measure	70
2. 2r-3v: First guard; finding the sword; strong against weak; inside/outside	71
3. 4r-4v: Against third; yielding when weaker; passing under	72
4. 5r-5v: Following the lowered blade; counter-disengage; second under; feint	73
5. 6r-6v: Feint from inside; second under; counter-disengage	74
6. 7r-7v: Opponent finds the sword; counter-fourth; close approach; weaker blade yields	75
7. 8r-8v: Yielding; opponent closes with strong to weak; lowering the point	76
8. 9r-9v: Low third; cover, counter-disengage, redisengage; feints	77
9. 9v-10r: Response to parry or hand-beat; final rule on breaking measure	78
Comparison of structure and logic	79
Appendix 2: Alfieri and the Paduan Legacy of Salvator Fabris	83
Editorial status and version	86
Corrections	86
How to cite this work	86
Practical training note	86
Questions for further research	86
Bibliography	87
Primary sources	87
Secondary and online sources	87
Suggested further reading by Guy Windsor	88

Introduction

Manuscript Sächsisches Staatsarchiv, 20532 Rittergut Rötha mit Trachenau, Nr. 2031 (Saxon State Archives, collection 20532, Rötha Estate with Trachenau, MS 2031) is a small bound paper manuscript titled Various Discourses on the Most Noble Art of Fencing. It measures approximately 14.5 × 12.3 cm (5.7 × 4.8 in.), as calculated from the scans as I have not had the opportunity to examine the manuscript in person. The Saxon State Archive identifies it simply as a seventeenth-century “Kunst des Fechtens” work, written by an Italian master.¹

The Rötha estate was acquired by Carl von Friesen in 1592 and remained in the von Friesen family until 1945. His son Heinrich von Friesen (1578–1659) held major offices in Saxony and is particularly interesting for us because the historical account says that he laid the foundations of the substantial Rötha library. The surviving Rötha library catalogue confirms that the collection’s origins probably extend into the sixteenth century and certainly into the seventeenth. It is therefore possible that MS 2031 entered the collection during Heinrich von Friesen’s lifetime, though there is presently no direct evidence establishing when or by whom it was acquired.

It seems to have been written by a single person, who was not a professional scribe. The handwriting starts out beautifully legible, and deteriorates over the first three folia, until by folio 4 it is quite hard to make out. He then gets a new lease of life for a much cleaner final page. It’s a very interesting window into the humanity of the author: everyone who writes with a pen is familiar with the phenomenon of your best intentions to write clearly getting eroded away by fatigue and old habits. I believe a professional scribe would have been much more consistent in the quality of the work.

One of the remarkable features of the manuscript is its presentation, with a cover page, a title, and a final inscription. It is clearly intended as a complete work, and one has to wonder about the intended audience. This could be a personal aide-memoire based on the teachings of a fencing master (possibly Fabris, but there’s no evidence of that); or it could be a present for a friend who was into fencing (but we might expect some kind of salutation in that case). It may be a draft of a book intended for publication, with the usual dedications, letters to the reader, and so on, expected to be added later once the publisher accepted the draft and gave a budget for illustrations (but there is no hint given of any potential images).

¹Abhandlung von der vornehmen Kunst des Fechtens, geschrieben von einem italienischen Meister. <https://www.archiv.sachsen.de/archiv/bestand.jsp?guid=27b2c42b-f5ae-45ec-9695-2c7c75938e10> accessed September 22nd 2026.

Transcription Notes

The transcription presented here began with a transcription prepared by Chris Vanslambrouck, to whom I am extremely grateful for finding the manuscript buried in the archives, and making his transcription freely available for researchers. As I worked through the manuscript in detail, particularly while attempting to reconstruct the fencing actions it describes, I repeatedly returned to the manuscript images to check individual readings. This developed into a complete re-examination of the transcription.

My transcription therefore differs substantially from Chris's original. Some of these differences are simply editorial. I have expanded all abbreviations, generally use v and u according to their modern values, and have made other presentational choices intended to make the Italian easier to read while retaining the spelling and language of the manuscript. The transcription preserves the manuscript's original line breaks where practical, both as a record of the physical text and to facilitate comparison with the facsimile.

Other changes are corrections or alternative readings of the manuscript itself. Some are minor and have little or no effect on the meaning. Others materially alter the fencing being described. For example, *cala* ("lowers") has been corrected to *cava* ("disengages"); *cavando il corpo* ("disengaging the body") to *curvando il corpo* ("bending the body"); *sopra la spalla* ("over the shoulder") to *sopra la spada* ("over the sword"); and *seguite la seconda incominciata* ("continue the second already begun") to *seguite la quarta incominciata* ("continue the fourth already begun"). Elsewhere, *gli tracciate* has been read as *contracavate* ("counter-disengage"), *intra quarta* as *contraquarta*, and *cavate di quarta in seconda* ("disengage from fourth into second") as *cedete di quarta in seconda* ("yield from fourth into second"). These are not trivial distinctions: they change the actions that have to be reconstructed physically.

One particularly significant example occurs where Chris read "*batendo voi trouata la spada*", suggesting a beat against the opponent's sword. Examination of the manuscript led me instead to read "*havendo voi trovata la spada*": "you having found the sword". This removes the beat entirely and substantially changes both the tactical situation and its interpretation.

Some corrections have implications beyond individual fencing actions. Where Chris's transcription reads *quando io dissi di trovare la spada, egli dice che mettiate il vostro forte al debile del nemico* ("when I said to find the sword, he says that you should put your strong against the opponent's weak"), I read *voglio dire che mettiate*: "when I said to find the sword, I mean that you should put your strong against the opponent's weak". This is important because the former might suggest

that the writer is reporting another person's teaching, whereas the latter has the writer explaining his own terminology.

Finally, near the end of the text, Chris reads that the body cannot *passare la finta nemica* ("pass the enemy's feint") in a single tempo. I read *passare la punta nemica*: "pass the enemy's point". This produces a coherent statement of the general tactical principle with which the discourse concludes: when the opponent retreats out of measure, one should not pursue an attack because the body cannot get safely past the opposing point in a single tempo.

These examples are not an exhaustive apparatus of differences. Many smaller corrections and editorial changes have been incorporated silently. Where a reading remains genuinely uncertain, I have preferred to mark that uncertainty rather than manufacture a confident solution.

The transcription printed here should therefore be understood as a new transcription made directly from the manuscript, based on Chris Vanslambrouck's earlier work but independently checked and revised throughout. The process of reconstructing the fencing proved particularly valuable as a check on the text: passages that appeared linguistically possible sometimes became problematic when translated into physical action, prompting another examination of the manuscript. Conversely, a corrected reading would sometimes make an otherwise obscure fencing action suddenly coherent. Transcription, translation, and practical interpretation have therefore informed one another throughout the preparation of this work.

Translation notes

I have translated *cavare/cavazione*, in all its forms, as “disengage/disengagement”. I have translated *distanza* as “distance”, and *misura* as “measure”.

I have translated *debile* and *forte* as “weak” and “strong”. These indicate respectively the portion of the blade nearer the point and the portion nearer the hilt. I have translated the names of the guards *prima*, *seconda*, *terza*, and *quarta* as first, second, third, and fourth.

I have preserved the manuscript’s paragraph breaks and indicated changes of folio in square brackets, for example [4v] and [5r].

I have left *tempo/tempi* and its variants untranslated, as it would collapse several intended meanings into one. *Tempo* signifies time, rhythm, a motion done in measure, and an opportunity to strike. *Contratempo* similarly describes an action made by taking advantage of the opponent’s action or motion, though its precise technical meaning varies between fencing sources.

I have translated *inquartare* as “do an *inquartata*”, because there is no good concise English equivalent for stepping out of the way at an angle, and historical fencers generally refer to the action as an *inquartata*. It literally means ‘to quarter’, as in to cut into quarters.

Likewise, *girata* has become common fencing language, especially among students of Fabris. Literally, it means a ‘turn’ or ‘turning’. Italian has two common and substantially overlapping verbs for ‘turn’: *girare* and *voltare*. *Girare* tends to emphasise rotation or movement around, while *voltare* tends to emphasise a change of orientation or direction. Thus one might *voltare* the head to look in a different direction, while *girare* can describe rotating the body around. We can see something of this distinction in the text: the author uses *girare* of turning the feet, and *voltare* of turning the hand into a different guard position.

I have inserted additional words in [square brackets] where necessary to indicate the sense. For example, “*voltando la spada in quarta et curvando ben il corpo sotto la nemica*”, literally means “turning the sword in fourth and bending well the body under the enemy”. Here *nemica* is feminine because it refers to an understood *spada*: that is, *la spada nemica*, “the enemy sword.” A literal English translation would misleadingly suggest that the fencer should bend his body beneath his opponent’s body, which would make little fencing sense. I have therefore rendered it as “turning the sword into fourth and bending your body well under his [sword].” Similarly, where normal Italian usage leaves a possessive implicit but the context clearly requires “your body,” I have supplied it in English. The translation otherwise follows the manuscript as written; I have not silently regularised technically awkward, obscure, or apparently erroneous passages.

The great advantage of translating fencing treatises is that we can sanity-check translations by interpreting the plays as written. I have a working interpretation of almost all of them, which has informed the translation in places (as I make clear in the commentary).

Transcription and Translation Side by Side

Italian transcription	English translation
[1r] D: B: A: E: F: A. Discorso alle prime lettioni di Spada Sola. Havendo da discorrere dalla spada sola, Prima è necessario di sapere: Che vi siano quatro guardie principali: dalle quali nascono tutti i tempi et contratempi, cavationi, contra cavationi: et commetter di spada. Et da questo si cavano ancho le contra posture: Et bisogna avertire: che a tutte queste ragioni è patrono la distanza larga, et la distanza stretta. La misura larga è, che non si puo ferire, Se non si [1v] muova il piede: Et stretta si di manda quella, che con lo slongare il braccio inanzi si può ferire il nemico senza muover il pie. Della misura stretta non si può far cosi piccolo moto, ch'il nemico non possa in quel tempo ferirci: ma ben impadronirsi della ragione con occuparvi la spada approssimandosi per offendervi poi nel secondo movimento. Et questo [ta?] l'quanto [deleted text] m'occorre a dirvi intorno alla generalita: facen dovi d'intendere che tutto d'parare et ferire: del quale ragionerò, si potrà osservare, cosi passando come non passando,	[1r] D. B. A. E. F. A. Discourse on the first lessons of the single sword. Since we are to discourse upon the single sword, it is first necessary to know that there are four principal guards, from which are born all the tempi and counter-tempi, disengages, counter-disengages, and actions of the sword. And from this are also derived the counter-postures. And it must be observed that over all these principles hold sway the wide distance and the narrow distance. The wide measure is that in which one cannot strike unless one [1v] moves the foot. And the narrow requires that, by extending the arm forward, one may strike the enemy without moving the foot. In the narrow measure one cannot make so small a movement that the enemy cannot strike us within that tempo; but one may indeed gain command of the principle, by occupying your sword and approaching, so as afterwards to strike you in the second movement. And this is as much as occurs to me to tell you concerning generalities, giving you to understand that all the parrying and striking which I shall discuss, may be performed either with a pass or without passing,

Italian transcription	English translation
[2r] dal ferire di seconda sotto la spada in poi : che in quella bota è necessario il passare, perche facendolo à piede fermo sarebbe pericolo. Oltra veniremo alle ragioni particolari. Et per esser la guardia prima quella che si forma nel metter mano alla spada, comincio d'essa. Essendo dunque il nemico nella dritta prima guardia, fa bisogno andar à trovar la nemica per di fuori con la spada, ò in forza, per tener la punta al nemico che sia possibile, et avertire, quando io dissi di trovare	[2r] [except for] striking in second beneath the sword, in which blow it is necessary to pass, because to do it with the foot fixed would be dangerous. Now we shall come to the particular principles. And since the first guard is the one formed in drawing the sword, I shall begin with it. The enemy being, therefore, in the straight first guard, it is necessary to go and find the enemy's [sword] on the outside with your sword, either by force, in order to keep the point as much as possible towards the enemy; and take heed, when I said to find
[2v] la spada, voglio dire che mettiate il vostro forte al debile del nemico perch' altrimenti non haverete avan taggio: Con il vostro forte ande rete stringendo la misura per ne cessitar ò a parare ò cavare. Perche volendo egli parare, lo ferirete di seconda sotto la spada: Et volen do cavare lo ferirete nel petto di quarta. Ma s'essendo il nemico in questa prima egli stesse in modo con la punta che non si potesse andare per di fuori, all'ora è necessario andare a ritro varlo per di dentro con la mano verso la quarta.	[2v] the sword, I want to say that you should place your strong against the enemy's weak, because otherwise you will not have an advantage. With your strong you will go on narrowing the measure, forcing him either to parry or to disengage. If he wishes to parry, you will strike him in second beneath the sword; and if he wishes to disengage, you will strike him in the chest in fourth. But if, the enemy being in this first [guard], he should hold his point in such a manner that you cannot go to it on the outside, then it is necessary to go and find him on the inside, with the hand towards fourth.

Italian transcription	English translation
[3r] Verso la quartta guardia, ma angulato alquant' in su, accioche il nemico non potesse ingannarvi la spada, Et anco nel andare a ritrovarlo, tener il piedo fermo; accioche, quando lui prendesse quel tempo, e non vi desse inanzi, che voi potreste parare, Che se starete con questo riguardo, egli non vi potrà dare, si egli non cava, et cavando voi contracaverete facendo una quarta, overo parereste con la terza nel tempo ch'egli cava, avanzando la spada inanzi con la punta contra il nemico per ferirlo ò nel petto ò nella faccia.	[3r] Towards the fourth guard, but angled somewhat upwards, so that the enemy cannot deceive your sword. And also, in going to find him, keep the foot still, so that if he should take that tempo and not come forwards at you, you may parry. If you observe this precaution, he cannot strike you unless he disengages; and when he disengages you will counter-disengage, making a fourth, or you will parry with third in the tempo in which he disengages, advancing the sword forward with the point against the enemy to strike him either in the chest or in the face.
[3v] Ma s'in quel tempo il nemico volesse parare, alhora passate con il pie manco inanzi voltando la spada in seconda et curvando ben il corpo sotto la nemica, et lo ferirete nel fianco diritto, non si fermando però, ma seguitate ancora con l'altro piede inanzi; Et passate fin al corpo nemico, accio che, quando esso volesse ritirare la spada per ferirvi, che voi sareste tanto inanzi, ch'egli non potesse ritrarla tanto: Et queste medesime ragioni vi serviranno ancora con tra la seconda guardia.	[3v] But if in that tempo the enemy should wish to parry, then pass forward with the left foot, turning the sword into second and bending the body well beneath the enemy's [sword], and you will strike him in the right flank. Do not, however, stop there, but continue forward with the other foot as well, and pass all the way to the enemy's body, so that, should he wish to withdraw his sword to strike you, you will be so far forward that he cannot draw it back sufficiently. And these same principles will also serve you against the second guard.

Italian transcription

[4r]

Ma ritrovandosi il nemico in terza con la punta alquanto piegata in dentro, voi andarete à trovarlo con la medesima terza per di fuori, et s' in quel tempo ch' egli cava spingerai in quarta: Però inanzi che lui habbia finita la sua cavatione, voi lo haverete ferito nel petto.

Ma si quando voi li trovate la spada, Egli volesse contrastare alla vostra, si voi fuste più forte, lo feriresti di seconda di sotto passando. Ma essendo voi più debole et bisognando cedere di spada, et dargli commodità d'entrare per fare una quarta, cavando quando lui entrasse, overo curvate ben il corpo inanzi, alzando il fornimento coprendosi la testa, alzando la mano manca et passare con tutto 'l corpo di dentro della spada, ferendolo di seconda nel petto.

[4v]

Ma quando voi trovate gli la spada lui cavasse ritirandosi cioe rompendo di misura: All'hora voi seguirete in quel medesimo tempo la sua con la vostra, portando il piede dritto inanzi, et s'in quel tempo lui volesse intrare di seconda sotto la vostra, alhora e necessario girare il piede manco per fuggire la nimica, et faciendo una quarta ferirlo nel petto.

Ma s'il nemico stesse in tal modo in questa terza, che non si potesse andergli di fuori, voi lo serrarete per di dentro, et s'in quel tempo, che voi lo serrate, lui volesse passare di sotto seconda, alhora voi voltate la mano in quarta, che lo ferirete nel petto.

Ma si quando gli trovate la spada, lui abbasasse la spada sua per salvarla che voi non gli la tro

English translation

[4r]

But finding the enemy in third with the point bent somewhat inward, you will go to find him with the same third but on the outside; and if, in the tempo in which he disengages, you thrust in fourth, before he has completed his disengage you will have struck him in the chest. But if, when you find his sword, he should wish to oppose yours, and you are the stronger, you will strike him in second underneath, passing. But if you are the weaker, and must yield with the sword and give him the opportunity to enter to make a fourth, disengaging when he enters, or bend the body well forward, raising the hilt covering the head, raising the left hand, and pass with the whole body to the inside of the sword, striking him in second in the chest.

[4v]

But when you find his sword, if he disengages while retreating, that is, breaking measure, then in that same tempo follow his sword with yours, bringing the right foot forward; and if in that tempo he should wish to enter in second beneath your [sword], then it is necessary to turn the left foot in order to escape the enemy's sword, and, making a fourth, strike him in the chest.

But if the enemy should remain in such a manner in that third that you could not go to him on the outside, you will close him on the inside; and if, in the tempo in which you close him, he should wish to pass underneath [in] second, then you turn the hand into fourth, [so] that you will strike him in the chest.

But if, when you find his sword, he should lower his sword in order to save it such that you cannot find

Italian transcription

[5r]

vasti, allora seguitate la con la punta voltando la mano in seconda o in prima, facendo che lui sara andato più abasso, non abbassando però la mano niente, voi lo coprirete di modo, che s'egli vorrà ferirvi, bisognerà ch'egli cavi, et voi à quel tempo contracaverete facendo una quarta, verso il suo petto, et lo ferirete inanzi ch'egli habbia cavato et passato.

Ma si quando voi andate à trovarlo in questa terza, egli volesse contrastare alla vostra, allora voi cedete di terza in seconda, curvando il corpo et passando col pie manco inanzi, che lo ferirete nel petto.

Ma si quando voi andate à ritrovarlo per di dentro, lui cavasse per ferirvi di fuori sopra la spada allora voi parate di terza drizzando la

[5v]

punta al visaccio per ferirlo nel petto; Ma si qu'ello parasse, nel tempo che lui para feritelo di seconda sotto la spada nel mettere il piede manco in terra, con il corpo ben curvato.

Ma si quando voi andate à ritrovarlo, lui cavasse ma si ritirasse, allora voi seguitatelo con pie dritto et con la spada alla spada sua, et si lui convertesse, voi girate di quarta.

Ma s'egli si fermasse, voi fategli subito una finta verso il suo petto, nel levar del piede manco et mentre che lui para, feritelo di seconda di sotto nel mettere il ditto pie in terra, et s'egli non parasse, seguitate il moto della finta di terza diritta sopra la spada, et si ben egli inquantasse, non vi offenderà, perche feriendo in giustezza, lo feriresti di fuori.

English translation

[5r]

it, then follow it with the point, turning the hand into second, or into first, causing him to have gone lower, but without lowering your hand at all, you will cover him in such a manner that, if he wishes to strike you, he will have to disengage; and in that tempo you will counter-disengage, making a fourth towards his chest, and will strike him before he has disengaged and passed.

But if, when you go to find him in this third, he should wish to oppose yours, then yield from third into second, bending the body and passing forward with the left foot, so that you will strike him in the chest.

But if, when you go to find him on the inside, he should disengage in order to strike you on the outside above the sword, then parry in third, directing the

[5v]

point towards his face in order to strike him in the chest. But if he should parry it, in the tempo in which he parries strike him in second beneath the sword as you place the left foot on the ground, with the body well bent.

But if, when you go to find him, he should disengage but retreat, then follow him with the right foot and with your sword against his sword; and if he should change, you turn into fourth.

But if he should stop, immediately make a feint towards his chest as you lift the left foot, and while he parries, strike him in second underneath as you place that foot on the ground. And if he does not parry, continue the movement of the feint in straight third above the sword; and even if he should do an inquantata, he will not offend you because, striking correctly, you will strike him on the outside.

Italian transcription

[6r]

Ma si quando voi li trovate la spada di dentro, lui non si rimovesse: all'hora voi farete una finta, voltando la mano in quarta tanto alta, che la diritta linea non possa offendervi, avanzando il pie dritto inanzi; et s'il nemico volesse parare, alhora voltate di quarta in seconda curvando ben il corpo che lo ferirete nel petto.

Ma, si quando gli fate la finta, lui volesse entrare di seconda sotto la vostra, alhora voi seguitate la quarta incommenciata, che lo ferirete nel petto inanzi che lui passi, et et girarete il piede manco per scampar di vita.

Ma si quando voi andate a ritrovarli la spada di fuori, lui cavasse per ritrovare la vostra di dentro, all'hora voi contracavate passando d'il piede manco inanzi, che lo ferirete nel petto, sopra la nemica, et s'egli parasse,

[6v]

cavate di sotto di seconda, seguitando con il piede dritto nel tempo, che lui farà il moto nel voler parare. Ma si voi lo trovate di fuori, lui cavasse semplicemente, solo per liberar la spada et non venisse inanzi voi in quel caso farete una finta di quarta in tempo che lui cava, avanzando il piede dritto inanzi, et mentre lui para, passate di piede manco curvando ben il corpo, voltando la mano in seconda che voi lo ferirete nel petto, che lui credeva à parare.

Ma s'il nemico fusse quello, che venisse à trovarvi per di fuori quando voi sarete nella terza, et ch'egli non movesse il piede, allhora non bisogna entrare, perche lui potesse ferirvi per esser piu grande nel parare, in

English translation

[6r]

But if, when you find his sword on the inside, he does not get out of the way, then you can make a feint, turning the hand into fourth sufficiently high that the straight line cannot offend you, advancing the right foot forward. And if the enemy should wish to parry, then turn from fourth into second, bending the body well, and you will strike him in the chest. But if, when you make the feint, he should wish to enter in second beneath yours, then continue the fourth already begun, and you will strike him in the chest before he passes, and turn the left foot in order to save your life.

But if, when you go to find his sword on the outside, he should disengage in order to find yours on the inside, then counter-disengage, passing the left foot forward, and you will strike him in the chest above the enemy's [sword]; and if he should parry

[6v]

disengage underneath in second, following with the right foot in the tempo in which he makes the movement to parry. But if you find him on the outside and he disengages simply to free his sword, without coming forward, in that case make a feint in fourth in the tempo in which he disengages, advancing the right foot forward; and while he parries, pass with the left foot, bending the body well and turning the hand into second, and you will strike him in the chest which he thought he was going to defend.

But if the enemy should be the one who comes to find you on the outside while you are in third, and he does not move his foot, then you must not enter, because he could strike you, being greater in the parry, in

Italian transcription	English translation
[7r] modo, che à far bene, bisogna in quel tempo, che gli viene, cavate mostrando d'entrar di quarta, avanzo il pie dritto inanzi, et se lui volesse parari facendo una contraquarta, girando il corpo, alhora voi cedete di quarta in seconda, passando di piede manco inanzi curvando ben il corpo, accioche la nemica passi vota per di sopra la vostra spada diritta. Ma si quando voi trovate la nemica per di fuori lui non si rimovesse, voi andate stringendo la misura per avvicinarvi tanto il corpo, che lo potete ferire inanzi che passa. Ma si nel avvicinarvi lui cavasse per fare una quarta, alhora fate una contraquarta, girando il corpo, che lo ferirete inanzi ch'egli habbia finita la cavatione.	[7r] such a manner that, to do it correctly, it is necessary, in the tempo in which he comes, that you disengage, making as though to enter in fourth, advancing the right foot forward; and if he should wish to parry, making a counter-fourth and turning the body, then yield from fourth into second, passing forward with the left foot and bending the body well, so that the enemy [sword] passes harmlessly above your straight sword. But if, when you find the enemy [sword] on the outside, he does not get out of the way, go on narrowing the measure so as to bring your body sufficiently close that you can strike him before he passes. But if, as you approach, he should disengage to make a fourth, then make a counter-fourth, turning the body, and you will strike him before he has completed the
[7v] Ma si quando voi andate stringendo la misura, avvicinandovi con la punta al corpo nemico, lui facesse moto di parare, con alzar la mano, alhora voi prendete quel tempo cavando di sotto di seconda, passando di pie manco, curvando ben il corpo, che lo ferirete nel petto. Ma si vi trovaste tutti dui in questa terza, et che voi fusti di fuori, et che fusti ancora piu debile, alhora non bisogna piu stringere la misura, ma cedere di spada cavandola alquanto in fuori, tenendo fermi i piedi, che farete duoi buoni effetti uno la liberatione d'ella vostra spada, l'altro che date l'occasione al nemico ad entrare, che quando lui entrasse voi girate in quarta cavando la spada di dentro, che lo ferirete nel petto.	[7v] But if, while you are narrowing the measure, approaching with your point towards the enemy's body, he should make a movement to parry, with the raising of the hand, then take that tempo, disengaging underneath in second, passing with the left foot, and bending the body well, and you will strike him in the chest. But if you should both find yourselves in this third, with you on the outside and also weaker, then you must not narrow the measure further, but yield with the sword, disengaging it somewhat outward, while keeping the feet still. By this you will produce two good effects: one, the liberation of your sword; the other, that you give the enemy an opportunity to enter, and when he enters, you will turn into fourth, disengaging the sword to the inside, and you will strike him in the chest.

Italian transcription

[8r]

Ma si quando cadete, lui non entrasse, ma serrasse la vostra con la sua spada, allora voi fingete d'entrare di quarta cavando, avanzando il pie dritto, quando nel serrar di lui non fusse venuto inanzi: Ma s'egli havesse strettamente la misura, bisogna far questo senza muover il pie, et nel tempo che lui crede à parare questa quarta, cader in seconda, passando di piede manco inanzi, che lo ferirete nel petto.

Ma si quando lui vene à serrarvi, et lui vi serrasse con il forte al vostro debile, et la sua punta alla vostra faccia, allora havendo voi trovata la spada, alzate un poco la mano con la medesima guardia, et abbassate tanto il corpo, che vi siate coperto senza toccar la sua spada, et nel medesimo tempo passate di sotto di seconda.

[8v]

Ma si quando cadete di spada, lui volesse ferirvi di seconda sotto la spada, allora voi girate il piede manco in quarta, che lo ferirete nel petto.

Ma si quando voi sete in questa terza, vi ritro vaste di dentro et piu debile, allora bisogna abbassare la punta verso terra, et s'in quel tempo l'inimico volesse entrare in quarta, allora voi girate di contraquarta, che lo ferirete nel petto, et lui passera voto.

Ma si quando voi bassate la punta verso terra l'inimico coprisse la spada, in quel tempo cavate et entrate di dritta linea in terza, che lo ferirete nel petto, et si ben lui contra cavasse per ferirvi di quarta, voi lo ferireste di fuori, et l'havresti ferito inanzi che lui havresti finita la cavatione.

English translation

[8r]

But if, when you yield, he does not enter but closes your sword with his, then feint an entry in fourth by disengaging and advancing the right foot, provided that in the closing he did not come forward. But if he had the exact measure, you must do this without moving the foot; and in the tempo in which he believes he is parrying this fourth, fall into second, passing the left foot forward, and you will strike him in the chest.

But if, when he comes to close you, and he should close with his strong against your weak, and with his point towards your face, then, having found the sword, raise the hand a little in the same guard and lower the body sufficiently that you are covered without touching his sword, and in the same tempo pass underneath in second.

[8v]

But if, when you yield with the sword, he should wish to strike you in second beneath the sword, then do an inquartata with the left foot, and you will strike him in the chest.

But if, while you are in this third, you should find yourself on the inside and weaker, then you must lower the point towards the ground; and if in that tempo the enemy should wish to enter in fourth, then turn in counter-fourth, and you will strike him in the chest while he passes harmlessly by.

But if, when you lower the point towards the ground, the enemy should cover the sword, in that tempo disengage and enter in the straight line in third, and you will strike him in the chest; and even if he should counter-disengage in order to strike you in fourth, you will strike him on the outside, and will have struck him before he has completed the disengage.

Italian transcription

[9r]

Ma si voi vi trovaste nella terza con la punta bassa verso à terra, et ch' il nemico cominciasse à coprirvi in lontana misura, allora voi cavate, avanzando il piede dritto inanzi per coprir la nemica, et si in quel tempo lui contra cavasse per ferirvi, dategli di quarta. Ma si egli contracavasse per ricoprirvi, allora voi cavate un'altra volta et feritelo di terza sopra la spada. Ma si quando voi ricavare lui volesse parare, dategli di seconda di sotto. Ma si 'l nemico fusse quello, che fusse basso, copritelo, et mentre che lui cava per coprire la vostra et voi contracavate, et coprite la sua, et si lui ricavasse, allora girate in quarta di sotto della sua spada, che lo ferirete nel petto: Ma si quando voi contracavare lui ricavando alzasse la punta, allora mostrate d'entrare in terza di fuori, et entrate di seconda di sotto, che lo ferirete inanzi che toccavi la vostra spada.

[9v]

Ma si quando voi lo coprite, lui non cavasse, ma stringesse la misura, allora voi pigliavi quel tempo, et feritelo di quarta nel petto.

Ma si quando voi lo coprite, lui finta movesse, allora voi mostrate d'entrar di quarta con la punta, alquanto alta verso la faccia, et mentre che lui crede à parare, cadete di seconda cavando il corpo, passando dapoi di manco, che lo ferirete nel petto.

Ma si quando voi fate la finta lui volesse parare per di fuori, allora voi cavate di sotto, feren do per di seconda. Ma si quando voi gli fate la finta, lui volesse battere di mano, allora seguite il moto incominciato che lui non vi potrà offendere, si ben egli volesse et voltasse di seconda, et voi lo ferirete nel petto inanzi ch'egli possa battere con la mano; Ma si nel fingerli lui rompesse di misura

English translation

[9r]

But if you should find yourself in third with the point low towards the ground, and the enemy should begin to cover you in distant measure, then disengage, advancing the right foot forward in order to cover the enemy [’s sword]; and if in that tempo he should counter-disengage in order to strike you, give him a fourth. But if he should counter-disengage in order to cover you again, then disengage once more and strike him in third above the sword. But if, when you re-disengage, he should wish to parry, give him second from below.

But if it should be the enemy who is low, cover him; and while he disengages in order to cover your [sword], you counter-disengage and cover his; and if he disengages again, then turn into fourth beneath his sword, and you will strike him in the chest. But if, when you counter-disengage, he should disengage again while raising the point, then make as though to enter in third on the outside, and enter in second

[9v]

But if, when you cover him, he does not disengage but narrows the measure, then take that tempo and strike him in fourth in the chest.

But if, when you cover him, he should make a feint, then make as though to enter in fourth with the point somewhat high towards the face; and while he believes he is parrying, fall into second, withdrawing the body and then passing with the left foot, and you will strike him in the chest.

But if, when you make the feint, he should wish to parry on the outside, then disengage underneath and strike in second. But if, when you make the feint against him, he should wish to beat with the hand, then continue the movement already begun, for he cannot offend you, even if he should wish to and should turn into second; and you will strike him in the chest before he can beat with the hand. But if, when you feint against him, he should break measure

Italian transcription

[10r]

perche restiresti ferito; Et questo in tutti casi
osservate di non entrare mai, quand'il
nemico rompe di misura: Perche voi
sete certo di non poter ferire per esser il
nemico andato lontano, e ch'il tempo
vien ad esser troppo lungo: Et basterà
ch'il corpo vostro non potrebbe passare
la punta nemica in un tempo; Di che
sarrebbe grandissimo pericolo restar
ferito.

Il Salvator Gran
Maestro in Italia

English translation

[10r]

you would remain struck.

And in every case observe this: never enter when the
enemy breaks measure, because you may be certain
that you cannot strike him, the enemy having gone too
far away, and the tempo thereby becoming too long.

And it is enough that your body could not pass the
enemy's point in a single tempo; from which there
would be very great danger of remaining struck.

Il Salvator Great
Master in Italy.

Transcription, Translation, and Analysis, line by line

In this section we will go through the text line by line for the purpose of extracting practical fencing instruction. To this end, I will discuss each technique first, then lay it out as a drill. I will assume you are interested in actually training in fencing, so use normal historical fencing terminology conventions, such as using the Italian terms for hand positions and guards (prima for first, etc.).

Academically, the transcription and translation are evidence; the analysis and interpretation are based on that evidence. Do not confuse my interpretation with the evidence itself.

We can see that the writer starts with the intention of organising his treatise according to the guard position your opponent begins with. This gives us about four actions against prima, which are then repeated against seconda.

Then the rest of the treatise, about thirty more plays, seem to be done against an opponent in third. Fourth doesn't seem to get a look-in.

In the fine tradition of apparently contradictory sources, this author states as a general rule that when your opponent breaks measure you should not follow them... but this after very many plays when you have successfully followed them after they broke measure. This could be another instance of a general rule having specific exceptions.

I have divided the treatise into the following sections:

- Cover Page
- Introduction and Theory
- Plays against Prima
- Plays against Seconda
- Plays against Terza

Note that these divisions are not named or specified in the text. Where there is a paragraph break I have noted it.

Numbering the plays is tricky, as it's not always clear which actions are variations on the same play, or should constitute a whole new play. For the purposes of being able to find a specific reference easily, I have given the separate plays (as I see them) numbers, and each play has its own descriptive title. These are both editorial, and should not be mistaken for divisions or descriptions made by the author.

Cover Page

Discorsi diversi dell' arte nobilissima di Schermire

Various Discourses on the Most Noble Art of Fencing

Von der vornehmen Kunst des Fechtens

On the noble art of fencing

The title in Italian appears to be the same hand as the rest of the text. The German version of the title is a shortened translation written in a different hand.



The symbol drawn seems to be a stylised version of the alchemical symbol for mercury, ☿, so, a cross with a circle above it and two horns. This could be a reference to Mercury /Hermes as the messenger, or an alchemical reference, or an authorial sigil, or it could have been put there by the owner of the manual. I have not been able to find it on any other manuscript in the Rötha collection, which would suggest that it was put there by the author, not the owner. It does appear from the scans that it's been done with the same pen and ink as the title and the rest of the work. We mustn't overlook the possibility that the author was just doodling.

Section 1: Introduction and Theory²

[1r]

D: B: A: E: F: A. Discorso alle prime lettioni di Spada Sola.

Havendo da discorrere dalla Spada Sola, Prima è necessario di sapere: Che vi siano quatro guardie principali: dalle quali nascono tutti i tempi et contratempi, cavationi, contra cavationi: et commetter di Spada.

D. B. A. E. F. A.³

Discourse on the first lessons of the single sword.

Since we are to discourse upon the single sword, it is first necessary to know that there are four principal guards, from which are born all the tempi and counter-tempi, disengages, counter-disengages, and actions of the sword.

Et da questo si cavano ancho le contra posture: Et bisogna avertire: che a tutte queste ragioni è patrono la distanza larga, et la distanza stretta.

And from this are also derived the counter-postures. And it must be observed that over all these principles hold sway the wide distance and the narrow distance.

Larga and *Stretta* are commonly used in Italian fencing manuals, going all the way back to Fiore dei Liberi's *Il Fior di Battaglia* (ca 1400). *Largo* / *a* has the sense of wide, free, unconstrained; *stretto* / *a* has the sense of narrow, tight, constrained.

La misura larga è, che non si puo ferire, Se non si [1v] muova il piede: Et stretta si di manda quella, che con lo slongare il braccio inanzi si può ferire il nemico senza muover il pie.

The⁴ wide measure⁵ is that in which one cannot strike unless one [1v] moves the foot. And the narrow requires that, by extending the arm forward, one may strike the enemy without moving the foot.

² Note I am creating these sections; they form part of my analysis, they are not present in the text.

³ The significance of these initials has not been identified. They may represent a name, title, motto, or conventional formula. "Don't be an elitist fencing a**hole" springs to mind but I'm confident that was not the author's intention.

⁴ There is a clear space between *distanza stretta* and *La misura larga*, though they are on one line. It's clearly intended as a kind of section break, probably constrained by the size of the page.

⁵ Note that previously the author used "*distanza*". He has now switched to *misura*.

This is the neatest, cleanest definition of *misura larga* and *misura stretta* I have ever come across.⁶

Della misura stretta non si può far così piccolo moto, ch'il nemico non possa in quel tempo ferirci: ma ben impadronirsi della ragione con occuparvi la spada approssimandosi per offendervi poi nel secondo movimento.

In the narrow measure one cannot make so small a movement that the enemy cannot strike us within that tempo; but one may indeed gain command of the principle, occupying your sword and approaching, so as afterwards to strike you in the second movement.

This is standard Italian fencing theory of the early 17th century (and later). In effect, any motion you make while in measure has to create an opportunity for your opponent to strike you. It seems the author is telling us that the motion with which you step into measure is not the motion in which you will strike. In this case “one” is the opponent, who can “occupy” your sword and approach. Striking in the second motion of the stringing is mentioned by Capoferro and others.

Et questo [ta?] l'quanto [deleted text] m'occorre a dirvi intorno alla generalita: facen dovi d'intendere che tutto d'parare et ferire: del quale ragionerò, si potrà osservare, così passando come non passando, [2r] dal ferire di seconda sotto la spada in poi : che in quella bota è necessario il passare, perche facendolo à piede fermo sarebbe pericolo. Oltra veniremo alle ragioni particolari.

And this is as much as occurs to me to tell you concerning generalities, giving you to understand that all the parrying and striking which I shall discuss, may be performed either with a pass or without passing, [2r] [except for] striking in second beneath the sword, in which blow it is necessary to pass, because to do it with the foot fixed would be dangerous. Now we shall come to the particular principles.

This is incredibly concise. The author has defined wide and narrow measure, and established the theory of tempo, and stated that all the actions that follow can be done with a pass or without, with one noted exception, striking below the sword in seconda. These are the “general principles”, now we move on to specific principles or theory. *Ragion* is a word with multiple meanings, including but not limited to:

- Reason as a rational faculty
- Reason as in cause or grounds
- Rule, principle, or method
- Proportion, ratio, or relationship

⁶ Compare with Capoferro (1610): “The narrow measure is of the foot, or of the right arm; the measure of the foot is of the fixed foot, or of the increased foot. The wide measure is, when with the increase of the right foot, I can strike the adversary, and this measure is the first narrow one.” From *Gran Simulacro*, Chapter IV: On Measure (translation by William Wilson and Jherek Swanger).

- Calculation, reckoning, or account.

In this case, I have translated it as “principle”.

The author now segues into actual plays of the sword, which are clearly intended as illustrations of the principles, rather than a complete list of possible techniques.

Plays of Prima

As the author describes prima as the one formed in drawing the sword, I'm confident that it looks much like Alfieri's or Capoferro's, so above the head and with the true edge up.

Prima, approach on the outside. Plays 1 and 2

Et per esser la guardia prima quella che si forma nel metter mano alla spada, comincio d'essa. Essendo dunque il nemico nella dritta prima guardia, fa bisogno andar à trovar la nemica per di fuori con la spada, ò in forza, per tener la punta al nemico che sia possibile, et avertire, quando io dissi di trovare [2v] la spada, voglio dire che mettiate il vostro forte al debile del nemico perch' altrimenti non haverete vantaggio:

And since the first guard is the one formed in drawing the sword, I shall begin with it. The enemy being, therefore, in the straight first guard, it is necessary to go and find the enemy's [sword] on the outside with your sword, either by force, in order to keep the point as much as possible towards the enemy; and take heed, when I said to find [2v] the sword, I want to say that you should place your strong against the enemy's weak, because otherwise you will not have an advantage.

Your opponent is in prima, possibly having just drawn their sword. *Metter mano alla spada* is literally to "place the hand on the sword", but in context it clearly refers to drawing it out of the scabbard. The reason that it's called "first guard" is because you form it naturally when you draw. There is no reason to suppose it is markedly different from Capoferro or Giganti's first guard, which are the natural end point of drawing the sword without letting the point go out of presence.

The author assumes you know what he means by the forte and debole of the sword (they are the half of the blade near the hilt and the half near the point, respectively). Note that the author spells debole as "debile", which is preserved in the transcription, but is not modern usage, or even standard for the period.

So, you approach on the outside of their sword, with your strong against their weak. This is the "by strength" option. This is also very clearly "finding", "gaining", or "stringering" the sword, as we see in every other Italian rapier treatise. Approach with your strong against their weak, to force them to make a motion in measure, which you will then take advantage of.

Con il vostro forte anderete stringendo la misura per necessitar ò a parare ò cavare. Perche volendo egli parare, lo ferirete di seconda sotto la spada: Et volen do cavare lo ferirete nel petto di quarta.

With your strong you will go on narrowing the measure, forcing him either to parry or to disengage. If he wishes to parry, you will strike him in second beneath the sword; and if he wishes to disengage, you will strike him in the chest in fourth.

So you approach, and your opponent will do one of two things: "parry", which in this context is clearly closing the line, adjusting the blade relationship to get their

forte against your debole. In this case, you will strike in seconda below their sword. This is because to adjust the blade relationship the opponent has to lift their point, creating an opening under their arm.

Or, if they disengage instead, you use that tempo to thrust in quarta. This is because their disengage will bring their point to your inside, so quarta will close that line.

This section is critically important as it defines how you approach to find the sword (your strong to their weak) and the opponent's probable reactions to it (*parare ò cavare*).

In English "parry" has the connotation of defending against an attack. In Italian, *parare* simply means to set aside. In this context, as the stringing is a preparation, not an attack (you don't strike in the tempo of your stringing), *parare* is indicating regaining the line, closing the line, reorganising the blade relationship to get a dominant position on your sword. In this context, I'll call it 'closing the line', as that's how we usually refer to this action in practice.

Cavare is literally to withdraw (as in *cavare il dente*, to pull out a tooth). It is generally understood in this context to be a disengage, where you move your sword from one side of the opponent's blade to the other. This is usually done around from underneath, but can be done up and over the point.⁷

Set up as a drill:

1. Partner is in prima
2. You approach on their outside, probably also in prima.
3. If they close the line, pass out of the way and thrust in seconda under their arm.
4. If they disengage, turn your hand to quarta, closing the line, and thrust to the chest.

⁷ Francesco Alfieri wrote in *La Scherma* (1640), p. 35 "I disapprove of making the disengagement in a circle, and consequently also the oval disengagement. And although this is approved by Salvator, a great master of this profession, nevertheless, with all due respect to him, I do not think it right to follow him, because even in making an oval disengagement the sword comes to describe a certain amount of a circle and to move away from the target. This makes it slower and easier to parry because of the greater distance involved, which does not happen when the disengagement is tight and continued along its line."

Prima, approach on the inside. Plays 3 and 4.

Ma s'essendo il nemico in questa prima egli stesse in modo con la punta che non si potesse andare per di fuori, all'ora è necessario andare a ritrovarlo per di dentro con la mano verso la quarta. [3r] Verso la quartta guardia, ma angulato alquant' in su, accioche il nemico non potesse ingannarvi la spada, Et anco nel andare a ritrovarlo, tener il piede fermo; accioche, quando lui prendesse quel tempo, e non vi desse inanzi, che voi potreste parare, Che se starete con questo riguardo, egli non vi potrà dare, si egli non cava, et cavando voi contracaverete facendo una quarta, overo parereste con la terza nel tempo ch'egli cava, avanzando la spada inanzi con la punta contra il nemico per ferirlo ò nel petto ò nella faccia.

But if, the enemy being in this first [guard], he should hold his point in such a manner that you cannot go to it on the outside, then it is necessary to go and find him on the inside, with the hand towards fourth. [3r] Towards the fourth guard,⁸ but angled somewhat upwards, so that the enemy cannot deceive your sword. And also, in going to find him, keep the foot still, so that if he should take that tempo and not strike forward at you, you may parry. If you observe this precaution, he cannot strike you unless he disengages; and when he disengages you will counter-disengage, making a fourth, or you will parry with third in the tempo in which he disengages, advancing the sword forward with the point against the enemy to strike him either in the chest or in the face.

The first thing to note is the author has not closed the either/or loop. Previously, you approach “either by strength” ... but there has not been an “or by something else”. I’d put this down to this being a manuscript draft, not a finished book.

The next set of plays occur if your opponent’s first guard is not open to be stringered on the outside, so you stringer on the inside, “with your hand towards fourth” guard. The author specifies that you should angle it somewhat upwards, to prevent it being deceived. I think this means that you lift your hand somewhat. Here’s why. Your opponent’s first guard has the hand above their head, their point hanging down a bit to threaten (usually) your face. To constrain their sword you have to cross it. You can’t control their sword if your blades are parallel. So, with their sword angling down from prima, you have to get your forte to their debole, while crossing their sword. If you lift your point from quarta, the blades will be parallel, so you need to lift your hand instead.

You “go to find him” with your “foot still”. This means you must already be in measure to stringer. As you move your sword hand to stringer, your opponent may take the tempo to strike you. If you are stepping forward, you are more at risk of being struck. Keeping your footwork conservative allows you to hedge against that possibility.

The whole point and purpose of your stringering is to force your opponent to disengage, which is the tempo you are trying to create. When they disengage you can either a) counter-disengage and thrust (probably to the chest), or b) parry with terza, using the false edge of your sword, and strike to the chest or face. The strike to

⁸ This odd construction repeating “towards fourth” and “towards the fourth guard” is present in the text, probably due to starting a new page.

the chest would be a thrust; the strike to the face after the parry with the false edge could easily be done as a cut (as we see in Capoferro, Plate 7). There are no cuts explicitly mentioned in the text, so it is probably intended as a thrust.

As a drill:

1. Partner is in prima
 2. You approach on their inside, in quarta. Make the final motion of the hand without stepping.
 3. They disengage, either to strike or to free their sword.
 4. As they disengage, counter-disengage and thrust in quarta.
 5. Or, as they disengage, parry with the false edge (hand in terza), and thrust to the face or chest.
-

Prima, inside: opponent parries; pass in quarta to the flank. Play 5.

[3v] Ma s'in quel tempo il nemico volesse parare, allora passate con il pie manco inanzi voltando la spada in seconda et curvando ben il corpo sotto la nemica, et lo ferirete nel fianco diritto, non si fermando però, ma seguitate ancora con l'altro piede inanzi; Et passate fin al corpo nemico, accio che, quando esso volesse ritirare la spada per ferirvi, che voi sareste tanto inanzi, ch'egli non potesse ritirarla tanto: Et queste medesime ragioni vi serviranno ancora con tra la seconda guardia.

But if in that tempo the enemy should wish to parry, then pass forward with the left foot, turning the sword into second and bending the body well beneath the enemy's [sword], and you will strike him in the right flank. Do not, however, stop there, but continue forward with the other foot as well, and pass all the way to the enemy's body, so that, should he wish to withdraw his sword to strike you, you will be so far forward that he cannot draw it back sufficiently. And these same principles will also serve you against the second guard.

The first question is, what tempo? The tempo of their disengage, your counter-disengage, your parry, or your riposte after the parry?

Given the pattern established when we approached on the outside, this could be their alternative response to being stringered. Previously they disengaged when you stringered them in quarta; now they are instead closing the line. Given that you are on their inside, this will naturally expose their right flank (we are assuming right-handed fencers unless explicitly told otherwise).

But in that case you are already in quarta, so how do you turn the sword in quarta? Perhaps this is instead what to do if the opponent is parrying your thrust in terza after your parry in terza. If that's the case, then turning your hand to quarta will drop your point, avoiding their parry. I would tend to this interpretation.

Once you have thrust them in the flank *keep moving forwards*. This is much easier to do if your sword has gone through them; training with blunt swords makes this harder to do without either injuring your partner or getting your sword hand cranked a bit.

This is a vital bit of instruction that applies very clearly to actual combat, and much less so to fencing your friends. It brings to mind Fiore's admonition in the 10th play of the second master of the zogho largo, when, having done the exchange of thrusts, you pass forwards again to disarm the opponent (see *From Medieval Manuscript to Modern Practice: The Longsword Techniques of Fiore dei Liberi*, pp 244).

Set up as a drill:

1. Partner is in prima
2. You approach on their inside, in quarta. Make the final motion of the hand without stepping.
3. They disengage to strike.
4. As they disengage, parry with the false edge (hand in terza), and thrust to the chest.

5. As they parry, turn your hand to quarta, pass out of the way, and thrust them in the flank.
6. Keep moving forwards with another pass to get too close for them to hit you.

The transcription and translation above are freely available under CC BY 4.0. The remainder of the practical fencing analysis, including the terza material, comparative analysis, discussion of authorship, and comparison with Fabris, is available at guywindsor.net/ms2031.

Bibliography

Primary sources

Alfieri, Francesco Ferdinando. *La Scherma di Francesco Ferdinando Alfieri, Maestro d'Arme dell'Illustrissima Accademia Delia in Padova*. Padua: Sebastiano Sardi, 1640.

Capoferro, Ridolfo. *Gran Simulacro dell'Arte e dell'Uso della Scherma*. Siena: Salvestro Marchetti and Camillo Turi, 1610.

Fabris, Salvator. *De lo schermo overo scienza d'arme*. Copenhagen: Henrico Waltkirch, 1606.

Giganti, Nicoletto. *Scola, overo teatro*. Venice: Giovanni Antonio and Giacomo de' Franceschi, 1606.

MS 2031. Sächsisches Staatsarchiv, 20532 Rittergut Rötha mit Trachenau, Nr. 2031.

Tomasini, Giacomo Filippo. *Gymnasium Patavinum Iacobi Philippi Tomasini episcopi Aemoniensis libris V comprehensum*. Udine: Nicolò Schiratti, 1654.

Secondary and online sources

Amberger, J. Christoph. "The Overly Successful Fencing Master—and a Lost Translation of Fabris." *The Secret History of the Sword*, 5 July 2024.

Sbriziolo, Lia. "Alfieri, Francesco Ferdinando." *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 2. Rome: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1960.

Van Noort, Reinier. "Compiling a Fencing Legacy Rooted in the Teachings of Salvator Fabris." *Acta Periodica Duellatorum* 13, no. 1 (2025; online publication 3 March 2026). DOI: 10.36950/apd-2025-002.

Wilson, William, and Jherek Swanger, trans. *The Great Representation of the Art and Use of Fencing*, translation of Ridolfo Capoferro's *Gran Simulacro*. 2002.

Wiktenauer. Transcriptions of Fabris, Capoferro, Giganti and Alfieri, including material prepared / edited by Michael Chidester.

Sächsisches Staatsarchiv. Catalogue entry for 20532 Rittergut Rötha mit Trachenau, Nr. 2031, "Abhandlung von der vornehmen Kunst des Fechtens, geschrieben von einem italienischen Meister." Accessed 22 September 2026.

Suggested further reading by Guy Windsor

[The Duellist's Companion, 2nd ed.](#) My detailed interpretation of Ridolfo Capoferro's Gran Simulacro (1610), covering the mechanics, theory, and techniques of his rapier system. The most useful companion to MS2031 for readers interested in comparing its anonymous author's fencing with a major contemporary Italian source.

[The Complete Rapier Workbook](#). A practical training programme based on my interpretation of Capoferro, taking the reader from basic stance, footwork, and blade actions through the complete system and into applying the techniques at speed, including sword and dagger and sword and cape. Every action, technique, and drill is supported by video, making this the practical follow-on for readers who want to train the kind of fencing discussed in MS2031.

[The Theory and Practice of Historical Martial Arts](#). My account of how to reconstruct a martial art from historical sources: establishing what the source says, developing an interpretation, testing it physically, and turning the results into a trainable system. It sets out the methodological approach underlying the practical analysis of MS2031.

You can find these and many more related works at swordschool.shop.