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DOMENICO ANGELO—GREAT FENCING MASTER OF THE XVIII CENTURY, CHAMPION OF FENCING AS A SPORT

“The past supplies the key to the present and the future. History forms the basis of all knowledge and is a convenient avenue of approach to any subject of study.”

Douglas Guthrie

INTRODUCTION

“It seems to me that there doesn’t exist any form of fight which wouldn’t eventually turn into game.”

Jean-Charles Pichon

The art of wielding weapons is as old as humanity. Humans from prehistoric times—fighting against nature, animals, and other people—have tried to make up for a lack of strength by using weapons. Throughout the centuries the weapons have changed—from very simple ones made of wood and stone, to sword and rapier, to light and sophisticated small swords. The ways of using weapons have also changed considerably with the passage of time.

From very remote times, to prepare for a real fight with sharp weapons, people used specially devised practice weapons and trained in their use. Exercises with practice weapons served mainly as preparation for a real fight with sharp weapons in battle or a duel.

It also happened that fighting with blunted practice weapons were used for—using contemporary terminology—sport competition. For example, in Egypt, one thousand nine hundred years before our era, a few hundred years before the Olympic Games in ancient Greece, international “fencing competitions” took place—as depicted by reliefs and inscriptions on the walls of temples in Luxor. Practice weapons were also known in ancient Crete.

In Europe in Medieval times, knights’ tournaments (fighting with lances, swords and other kinds of weapons), which were originally based on military exercises, were a great show resembling modern sport competition. The organisation, entries, audience, referees, “sponsors”, ceremony of prize giving and rules of rivalry and fair play at these tournaments may all be considered as the beginnings of the rituals and customs typical for contemporary athletics. After the knights’ tournaments, it is not very well known, in the XVI century, there were competitions with heavy swords with the target being from the waist upwards and—for safety reasons—certain conventional rules of scoring the hits were obligatory.

In a later period, the XVII century, there took place fencing competitions in celebration of Flower Days, held yearly in May. Importantly, from a historical point of view, the competition was conducted with the foil with a direct elimination system and with the application of conventional rules. It is worth noticing that these conventional rules, written in nineteen concise points, form the basis of the contemporary conventional rules for foil and sabre (limitation of valid target; priority of certain actions, e.g. attack or riposte).

The Medieval fights with heavy swords (often two-handed swords and shields) were primitive and very simple. The decisive factors were strength and endurance. There, of course, could not be very high mobility or subtle technique with such heavy weapons.

The first signs—though still very primitive—of contemporary, highly mobile and technical fencing might be seen in rapier and dagger fencing, which developed all over Europe, but peaked in Italy and Spain between the XVI and XVII century [1]. Great Italian fencing masters of that period introduced such concepts and practices as the importance of distance and

special space in a bout, feeling of surprise (*scelta di tempo*, timing), counter-attacks, feints, lunge starting with the front foot (previously the movement would begin with the rear foot) and counter-time (*tempo contra tempo*).

In the middle of the XVII century, a new weapon appeared: the small sword (*l'épee de la court*). It was a very light weapon with a relatively short, triangular blade with a handle, knuckle guard (knuckle-bow), *padan*, *pas d'ane*, crossbar and *ricasso*. In fights with the small sword, only thrusts were used (in rapier, both cuts and thrusts were used). It was the first weapon with which one could execute both offensive and defensive actions (rapier was used only for offensive and counter-offensive actions and defensive actions were made with dagger). Due to its lightness and relatively short blade, apart from attacks, parries and ripostes became very important.

Because practice with the very light and sharp small sword was very dangerous (the protective mask was not yet used), a new weapon, primarily devised for practice only—foil—was introduced. To begin with, foil served only as preparation for real bouts with a small sword. The introduction of foil made great progress possible in fencing theory, technique, tactics and in the methodology of teaching fencing with thrusting weapons. Gradually, new ways of moving, a modern lunge, parries, ripostes, counter-ripostes, engagement and change of engagement, actions on the blade, etc., were introduced and improved.

The lack of masks during the first period of foil fencing—the second half of XVII and first half of XVIII centuries—made practice dangerous and led to slow, careful execution of strokes; and the use of practice bouts were practically impossible. Also, certain convention rules had to be strictly adhered to: a) strict limitation of valid target area: right-upper part of trunk; b) priority of certain actions, in case of double hit: priority of attack over counter-attack, priority of riposte over remise and redouble, priority of *derobe*.

Only the introduction of masks in the second half of the XVIII century by *la Boessiere*, *le père*, created a great revolution in fencing practice: it allowed much greater speed of execution of various strokes, attacks, parries, ripostes, etc.; there was an introduction of new fencing strokes and—above all—the possibility of loose play. (In my opinion, the introduction of masks to fencing practice was a bigger “revolution” than the introduction of the electrical judging apparatus in the XX century.) Strangely enough, not all fencing masters accepted the mask willingly. Some of them, like the hero of this article, *Domenico Angelo*, thought them effeminate. With the passage of time, the masks were generally accepted and played a major part in the development of fencing, not only as preparation for duels, but also as a sport.

In the XVII century and the first half of the XVIII century, as was mentioned before, fencing with the foil served only one purpose: preparation for a real fight with small swords. Only those actions which could be useful in a duel or battle were developed. At the end of the XVIII century, apart from the realistic fighting trend of fencing, there appeared a new direction of fencing which one could name fencing as a sport, art and pleasant past-time—developing a recreational sport athletic trend. One of the most outstanding and known champions of this new approach to fencing was the famous fencing master *Domenico Tremanondo Angelo*. The aim of this article, based on different sources, literature and econographic material, is to describe and analyse the life and work of this famous master.

THE LIFE, ACTIVITIES AND DEEDS OF ANGELO

“In eighteenth-century London where, to judge from the memoirs of the time, it was remarkable not to be remarkable, an outstanding figure was that of Angelo the famous maître d’armes.”

J. D. Aylward

The founder of “the dynasty and institution of Angelo”, Domenico Malevolti Tremanondo Angelo was born in Leghorn (Livorno), in the year 1717. His parents were a rich Livornian merchant, Giovanni Tremamondo, and a Neapolitan marquise, Angiola Malevolti.

His father was preparing Angelo for the merchant profession but, from an early age, he showed great enthusiasm and interest in horse-riding and fencing. Angelo’s first fencing lessons were from a fencing master from Pisa, Andrea Gianfaldoni. We may suppose that his study of fencing under Gianfaldoni went no further than what was usual in the case of young men of rich families for whom swordsmanship, riding and dancing were indispensable parts of polite education. Equally important was travel, and Domenico visited Florence, Turin, Naples, Rome and Venice (where he spent some time with the famous painter, Canaletto). Young Angelo travelled a lot throughout Italy, demonstrating his outstanding fencing talent and abilities.

Young Domenico Angelo was sent by his father to Paris in order to study accounting and trade. In Paris, however, Angelo was mainly occupied with horse-riding, which he learned from the famous riding master, Gueriniere, and fencing, which he studied under the direction of the very brilliant fencing master, Teillagory. Angelo, with his remarkable motor abilities, soon became famous as one of the most known and respected “masters of horse-back riding” and an excellent fencer with impeccable style and astonishing precision of movement.

Domenico frequented the fencing salle of the famed master, Pierre Donnatieu. In this salle a great display of fencing was to take place between Angelo and another famous fencer—a well-known figure of the XVIII century—the Chevalier de Saint-George [2]. The great fencing gala did not come off because of a famous and very beautiful Irish actress, Margaret Woffington. Angelo was so fascinated by her that he joined her entourage and came to England from Paris at about 1750, accompanied by Margaret Woffington, whose beauty and coquetry took society by storm. The British fencing historian, J. D. Aylward, describes the event:

Following the paths which appeared to his imagination, and a general favourite among his friends, Domenico might have continued indefinitely the life of a man-about-town in Paris had not romance intervened. Fencing at a demonstration arranged at the hotel of the Duc de Nivernais, the handsome Italian was lucky enough to attract the smiles of Mrs. Margaret Woffington, the actress, then on a visit to Paris. Impulsively, the Irish beauty presented Domenico with a bunch of roses taken from her own corsage; the favoured fencer pressed it to his lips before pinning it to his right breast and challenging all opponents to disturb a single leaf of it. Needless to say, the roses emerged undamaged from the ordeal; mutual interest ripened into mutual affection, and when Peg went back to England, Domenico Angelo was her travelling companion [3].

Angelo’s father did not like his son’s style of life and, as a result, he withdrew all financial support. From that time, Domenico had to rely on his own resources and initiative. In Angelo’s private life, it should be noted, the affair with Peg Woffington did not last very long. Soon after establishing himself in London, Domenico married a young girl with whom he lived happily until the end of his life. It was a happy marriage which started a new period in Angelo’s life. In 1756, Angelo met Lord Pembroke, who came back from his great voyage across the European continent. Soon Angelo became very friendly with Pembroke, Montgomery and other prominent figures of contemporary London which added greatly to his prestige and position in London high-society.

The tales of Angelo’s fencing prowess spread widely and an Irish physician, Dr. Keyes, called on him for a friendly sporting duel with foils. Angelo’s friends arranged the fencing meeting in the Thatched House Tavern and a great crowd of friends and fencing fans came to watch the event. Domenico Angelo gave such a display of his fencing abilities, beauty of movements and such precision with his weapon that “all of London” was talking about it for a long time. Afterwards, the princess of Wales declared him the official master of horse-riding and fencing for her sons, one of whom would later become King George III. She also found an appropriate location for Angelo’s fencing salle—Leicester Square. The friendship of the royal family and acquaintance with many influential people helped our master in the development of

his horseback-riding and fencing “enterprise”. In 1763, Angelo bought an impressive building, Carlisle House, in Soho.

In 1758, on Pembroke’s initiative, Angelo gave displays on the art of horseback-riding in the presence of King George II. The demonstration made a very big impression on the king. So Angelo, blessed by the king’s favour, became a very fashionable master of horseback-riding and fencing among the royal court, aristocracy, artists, actors and poets.

Founded in Carlisle House, Angelo’s Fencing Academy began to develop very successfully. Young pupils learned there fencing, horse-riding, foreign languages and exquisite manners. They received a versatile, many-sided education thanks to—among other things—contact with outstanding people. Many famous fencers met here, among them the well-known and popular Chevalier d’Eon (as it later turned out, to everyone’s great astonishment, the famous Chevalier d’Eon, was a woman).

Angelo (unlike his great adversary, the distinguished French master, Danet) was not an innovator; he did not introduce new solutions to fencing technique and tactics. Vigeant (the famous fencing master and connoisseur of fencing of the XIX century) thought that Angelo based his teachings on Labat’s school [4]. Published in 1697, Labat’s textbook was, perhaps, not so brilliant as de la Touche’s book or de Lyancourt’s, but it contained simple and logical presentations of a new (compared to rapier) fencing school with thrusting weapons. Labat’s book is also priceless because it contains the first description of conventional rules for fencing with the foil described in nineteen points—the rules applied at the famous foil competition in Toulouse at the end of the XVII century.

Domenico Angelo as a teacher of fencing was rather conservative, but he distinguished himself by a great pedagogical talent and charming personality. He taught classical fencing with the foil (which was a preparation for a real fight with small swords—*épée de la court*). However, and perhaps more importantly, he also was one of the first to treat the cultivation of foil fencing, not only as preparation for a duel, but as a sport and past-time. Fencing under Angelo was a fashionable and elite sport, developing “elegance and poise”.

Like other masters of the small sword period, Angelo recognised only thrusts to the chest as valid. Angelo’s fencing was very conventional—after having parried the opponent’s thrust one had to, according to Angelo, allow the opponent to return from lunge to on-guard position and, only then, try to score a hit with riposte. Displacements on the fencing strip were minimal. It was very static compared to contemporary fencing. The fencing was highly stylised, artistic and graceful but lightning fast movement was not prominent. Angelo, further, did not use masks. (The masks of carnival type were already known and presented in the famous French *l’Encyclopédie* [5]. The new masks, similar to modern ones, were introduced at the end of the XVIII century by fencing master la Boissiere, le père. This type of mask of is depicted in Rowlandson’s picture presenting Angelo’s Academy. As mentioned earlier, Angelo considered the mask to be effeminate.) The exercises were conducted with great dignity and courtesy, paying great attention to correctness of movement and beauty of style.

Angelo, in spite of great emphasis on courtesy and style, had to take into account that his pupils—especially during their journeys to Italy and other countries on the European continent—might be forced to defend their lives by means of a small sword. Therefore, he taught, also, various ways of disarming the opponent. In his famous textbook, no less than seven drawings depict various ways of disarming and fighting someone who, yielding a rapier, does not obey the rules of courtesy but is, rather, aiming to kill his opponent.

What, speaking most generally, was the essence of Angelo’s school? He acquired simple and basic principles of the French foil school—such as he learned in Paris from the master Teillagory. In Domenico Angelo’s famous book, the influence of the French masters of *épée de la court* (practice in the use of which was conducted with foils)—Labat, de Lyancourt, de la

Peche and others—is clearly visible. He limited his teaching to relatively simple, verified fencing strokes and actions which he explained in a simple and understandable manner. He emphasised the importance of defensive actions (parries), especially when fencing with sharp weapons. (The “predecessor” of small sword—rapier—was mainly an offensive weapon; the small sword was the first weapon with which one could use both offensive and defensive actions. In fencing with the rapier, parries, as we understand them today, were practically not used. The attacked fencer defended himself either by counter-attack—stop-hits or hit with opposition—or parry with the left hand using dagger.) Angelo underlined that each fencer ought to be more efficient in defence than in offence, which was understood, taking into consideration the possibility of fighting with sharp weapon and against a “real” opponent.

Angelo’s “weak points”, mentioned before, were disarmament. He distinguished four main varieties of disarmament. They were quite complicated and based on the principle of leverage and application of “pass”, a cross-over lunge, with a simultaneous catching of the opponent’s weapon hilt. The value of these actions in fights with sharp weapons was probably rather doubtful and the great master himself admitted that these varieties of disarmament are more subtle and brilliant when well-executed in a fencing salle than useful with a sharp weapon in hand.

Angelo taught a very “elegant” on-guard position with body weight on the rear foot and with trunk leaning slightly back, which was supposed to protect the face from accidental hits. While executing parries and, even more so, in offensive actions—as well as in executing lunges—he recommended a high position of the hand which made fixing the point easier and, above all, protected the face. (It is extraordinarily curious today, when masks have been used for many, many years and when the electrical box faultlessly registers the hits, quite a number of fencing coaches still recommend such a high elevation of the hand. To me, it is a typical example of “functional fixation”, not to say thoughtlessness.)

From the old school, Angelo still taught flaconade (in spite of the fact that de Lyancourt already condemned this action in 1686 [6]), defence with the left hand, evasive half-turn (“demi-volte”) and evasive duck (Italian, “passato sotto”). Apart from a more modern lunge (with the front foot starting the movement), Angelo advised in certain actions the application of “pass” (remnant of old Italian rapier play)—which was a long cross-over step applied in offensive actions. “Pass” may be considered a primitive version of the contemporary fleche (note: sabreurs used to sometimes apply, in “open eyes” attacks, such a primitive model of fleche; fleche is, of course, now prohibited in sabre fencing).

Angelo taught both cross-over steps and lunges (with the rear foot moving before the front foot), an influence of the old rapier school, and modern ways of advancing (described for the first time by Charles Besnard in 1653) as well as a lunge starting with the front foot (described first by Capoferro in 1606 and Giganti in 1610).

Directing the movement of the weapon by means of delicate and precise movement of the fingers—the famous “doigté” of the French school—was still unknown (it was introduced in the XIX century). Thus, the weapon was directed and controlled by movements of the elbow joint and the wrist. As Angelo used to say, “The wrist and elbow are the main actors.”

Angelo was the first fencing master who mentioned angular thrusts, thrusts in which weapon do not form a straight line. They are, so to speak, thrusts “round the corner” which are very commonly used today in modern foil fencing.

Angelo taught the following basic weapon positions, which constituted either parries or starting positions to execute various thrusts:

- first position (*prime*)—the same as contemporary prime parry, the only of Angelo’s parries with the arm distinctly bent at the elbow;
- second position (*seconde*)—the hand, in pronated position, defends low outside line;
- third position (*tierce*)—the hand in pronated position, defends high outside line;
- fourth position (*quarte, carte*)—the hand, in full supination, defends high inside line;
- fifth position (equivalent of *quinte* or half circular or *mezzo-circio*, semi-circular parry of Italian school)—the hand supinated, the parry executed with a very wide movement (the present day *quinte* parry of French school is completely different, it is like low *carte* parry of Italian school).

Angelo called a parry executed in defence of a thrust in *carte* above the weapon (“*carte over the arm*”), “feather parade”. Apart from the prime parry, all other parries in Angelo’s school were executed with the upper-limb nearly completely extended and with a relatively high position of the fencer’s hand.

The defensive system of Angelo has been presented very briefly and with some simplification of the terminology.

Angelo, like de Lyancourt, and the majority of the masters of the small sword, was a great supporter of “circle parade”, which was for him “the main defending position of epee”. This parry is, in a way, a combination of prime and counter-*tierce* parries. This parry was executed extending the arm with a clockwise circular movement of the weapon’s point, trying to make the movement “big enough to cover from head to knees” [7]. It was a parry which could be used against various feints and thrusts, particularly useful while fighting at night. This way of executing the circle parry, reminiscent of the old Italian school of rapier, was given up, in later years, by fencing masters teaching small sword. In spite of this, such a progressive and innovative teacher as Danet did teach such a parry.

By “diminishing” *quinte* and circular parries, there evolved in the French school the septime parry (the first time the name, “septime”, was used was in the French *l’Encyclopédie* [8]. A fencer may be surprised that such a popular parry as sixth has not been mentioned. The sixth parry was introduced in France only in the first half of the XIX century and in Italy still later.). The application of the *tierce* parry in high outside line constitutes a remnant of old rapier fencing in which parries with pronated hand position were “strong” and were well suited to defend against rapier cuts.

Angelo described and named offensive actions taking into consideration the position of the hand and the initial position of the weapon, thus a thrust with hand in *seconde* or thrust in *tierce*, etc. After *carte* parry, one could riposte in the line of *carte* but, equally, one could riposte in a different way, for example, in the line of *tierce*.

The majority of thrusts, both in attacking and riposting, were executed with hands in pronation (excluding thrusts in *carte* and *quinte*). More precise thrusts with supinated hand and parries in a supinated position were introduced in the XIX century—sixth parry, octave parry.

Apart from the basic thrusts, like thrust in *tierce*, thrust in *carte*, etc., Angelo also taught a cut-over thrust (“*coupé*”). The execution of *coupé*, or cut-over thrusts, reached a level of perfection in the XVIII century. In a bout, these thrusts were very effective at taking an opponent by surprise and very difficult to parry. (Fencing constantly develops; it undergoes various changes and, quite often, old actions come back and are used again in a slightly changed form. So in modern fencing, with epee and foil, apart from classical directed and fixed thrusts, thrown hits, so-called “flicks”—not to be confused with cut-over thrusts which are not a way of fixing the point, but a different kind of thrust—are very often used.)

The majority of masters writing about fencing at that time put great emphasis on and spend a lot of time describing various ways of fighting against a left-handed opponent. Usually, they came to the conclusion that the difficulties in fencing against a left-hander are simply due

to the fact that they are rarely encountered. (It is so, but it is not the whole explanation. The percentage of left-handed finalists of great international competitions compared to the percentage of left-handed people in a given society is markedly higher.) Angelo was of the firm opinion that an efficient fencer ought to practise and skilfully yield the weapon both with his right and left hands. Perhaps under the influence of his opinion, the Earl of Pembroke advised his son, Herbert—who took fencing lessons in Paris from the famous master Monet—to “practise fencing everyday using, as often as possible, the left hand.”

Angelo would give some lessons left handed and also insisted on his pupils practising various strokes left handed. A fencing master giving a lesson with his left hand allows the pupil to adapt himself to bouts with left-handed opponents. Exercises with the left hand by the pupil have also very positive influence: improvement of motor co-ordination, prevention of one-sidedness and scoliosis, it provides active rest and ensures transfer of skill (perfecting certain movements with left hand leads to better execution of them with right hand).

Angelo’s description of feint-attacks proved his great knowledge and practical experience as well as his ability of clear and logical presentation of difficult and complicated actions. Here is a short example of the style with which Angelo describes one of the varieties of feint-attack: feint of thrust with opposition in the line of tierce, feint of disengagement thrust in inside line, disengagement thrust in outside line (this is a simplification using contemporary terminology). Angelo describes it as follows:

If the opponent’s weapon is outside your weapon, you must execute a short thrust with opposition with a stamping of your foot, and when you feel that the opponent executing pressure on your weapon, execute a feint into the inside line, then subtly disengage into the outside line, thrust in carte over the arm, executing a cross-over lunge with the left leg according to the previously described principle of this movement. You should notice that all attacks executed in the outside line are parried with a high position of the hand in tierce, whereas those in inside line are parried with the prime or carte parry with a high position of the hand, hand always on the level of the face [9].

Describing another feint-attack, finishing with disengagement thrust in carte, Angelo adds, “After having executed this, come back to on-guard position and try to find the opponent’s blade by circle parry.” One may guess that this is an action “just to be safe”, a safety measure against the opponent’s possible thrust if the initial attack did not succeed.

In 1763, the first edition of Angelo’s magnificent and famous work, *L’École des Armes* [10], appeared. It is one of the best known and luxuriously published textbooks of fencing. This excellent book contains forty-nine magnificent engravings, drawn by J. Gwynn, and engraved by Crignon, Ryland and Chamber. For these drawings the great master, himself, posed and his partners were his son Harry, Lord Pembroke, the Chevalier d’Eon, and others. The beauty of these engravings and the accuracy of the presented positions and movements are really most impressive. Rich pupils from the English aristocracy, nobles and people of culture and art all greatly helped in the publication of the book. The original text of the book was in French.

In 1765, a second edition [11] of Angelo’s work appeared, this time with double text—in French and English.

The third edition appeared in 1767 and was very much like the second. In 1787, Angelo’s son, Harry—then head master of Angelo’s Academy—published a book [12] which was a reproduction of his father’s work, containing only the English text with all the drawings reduced in size.

The system of fencing presented by Angelo was one which, in the middle of the XVIII century, was promoted and applied by the French Royal Academy of Fencing—“Compagnie des

Maitres en fait d'Armes du Roy en la Ville et Fauxbourgs de Paris" (*"The Royal Association of Masters of Yielding Weapons of the City and Suburbs of Paris"*).

A few words should be stated about the Academy: The famous "Compagnie des Maitres en fait d'Armes du Roy en la Ville et Fauxbourgs de Paris", after a flourishing existence of nearly 200 years, was dissolved during the French Revolution. Augustin Rousseau, the Academy's last head, whose father and grandfather had taught King Louis XIV and Louis XV, respectively, was guillotined in 1793, most probably for the mere fact that he had been, as the Act of Accusation put it, "Maître d'armes des enfants de Capat" (*"The Fencing Master of the Children of Capat"*). Notwithstanding its tragic end, one has to admit that this famous fencing academy had great merits in the development of fencing, not only in France, but in other countries, as well.

Domenico Angelo admitted to being greatly influenced by his master in Paris and very greatly appreciated the abilities of French masters. He wrote, among other things: "I should be unjust if I did not admit the talents of French fencing masters. On the basis of my knowledge, I am of the opinion that they are the first fencing masters of the world as far as courtesy and efficacy."

Emile André [13] is of the opinion that in preparing Angelo's book, of a great help was the famous Chevalier d'Eon, who spent several years with Angelo in London and who, like Angelo, was a pupil of Teillagory in Paris.

When Angelo's great work appeared in London, Diderot and his co-workers in Paris were very busy publishing the famous French *l'Encyclopédie* [14], which greatly influenced public opinion just prior to the French Revolution. Fascinated by the magnificent publication, clarity of style and beautiful drawings of *L'Ecole des Armes*, Diderot asked the author for permission to publish its text in *l'Encyclopédie*. Angelo agreed and in Volume IV of the Encyclopaedia, under the heading of "Fencing", Angelo's work appeared together with 49 drawings, reduced in size by Lachausse.

The choice of an Italian, who—though he studied fencing in Paris—taught in London and—what is worse—did not possess an official fencing master diploma, to present fencing in *l'Encyclopédie* caused great shock and indignation among the members of the Royal Fencing Masters Academy in Paris. Both law and custom gave the masters in this association the exclusive privilege to teach fencing and award fencing master diplomas. The Fencing Masters Academy enjoyed many laws and privileges given by successive French kings throughout nearly 200 years. Although Domenico Angelo did study fencing in Paris and did it under the direction of an excellent French master and, no doubt, was an excellent fencer, he, formally, had no right to use the title *Maitre en fait d'Armes* because he never submitted himself for an official examination at the Academy. Particularly offended was Guillaume Danet, head of the Royal Fencing Masters Academy in Paris.

In spite of misunderstandings with Danet (see below)—and perhaps these quarrels increased, even more, Master Angelo's fame—his academy prospered excellently, not only by regular pupils but by many renowned guests from England and abroad. The master earned about 4000 pounds yearly which, in those times, was quite a lot.

In Angelo's Fencing Academy, not only men were among the pupils but—which was a great novelty in those days—women as well. They were mostly theatre actresses who probably dreamt of the role of Hamlet.

In 1760, having not drawn the proper conclusions from the magnificent role of his friend, the famous Garrick, in *King Lear*, Angelo handed down control of his academy in London to his

son, Harry, and he, himself, took a fencing master's post in a school in Eton. Harry [15], and afterwards his sons, continued Angelo's academy traditions in London for dozens of years.

Two centuries later "the great son of the Korean nation", the beloved and respected Kim Ir Sen, said, wisely, "As long as one lives, one should work." Angelo probably did not foresee these words, but he worked very intensively, giving lessons until the end of his life. He died in 1802 at the age of 86, one typical example of the vitality and energy of a large number of great fencing masters.

THE DISPUTES, MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND QUARRELS BETWEEN ANGELO AND DANET

"J'aurais été bien à plaindre s'il m'eut fallu copier les figures et les principes de son traité. . . que ne contient rien de plus intéressant, rien de nouveau, que celui du sieur Girard, dont il a rajourné les erreurs."

G. Danet

The quarrels and exchanges of words between Danet and Angelo give us additional information about fencing in XVIII century.

It has already been mentioned that the insertion of Angelo's work in *l'Encyclopédie* made Danet, head of the French Academy of Fencing Masters, most indignant. At the time, Danet was busy publishing his own work, *Art des Armes* [16], which appeared in 1766. Danet's indignation became still greater when Angelo, in the London Press, accused him of plagiarism. The accusation, as a matter of fact, was rather baseless, especially taking into consideration that Angelo could not have known Danet's text, which only first appeared in 1766.

Danet, in his work, severely criticises Angelo's views and presents new views on the art of fencing. In his book, he shows a great knowledge of the subject and criticises not only Angelo, but generally all obsolete views, methods and practices. Danet proved himself to be a very bold innovator.

In presenting his views (and it must be admitted that the literary style of his book is quite beautiful), he accepted the old habit of his predecessors of introducing into the text the character of a very curious and inquisitive pupil who asks questions which are then answered in detail by the experienced master. Danet's "master" takes advantage of the occasion to make very critical remarks about "the author from London" (having in mind, of course, Domenico Angelo). Danet criticises the orthodox methods of teaching fencing used by old coaches, including obsolete and dangerous tricks of fencing with rapier and dagger. "Angelo, for example"—stresses Danet—"teaches such follies like disarming the opponent, executing a pass, he teaches voltes and teaches such absurdities as fighting with the dagger, cloak and lantern. In other words, anachronisms which have disappeared in civilised countries."

Danet tried to introduce a completely new system of fencing terminology and classification of fencing actions which was highly complicated but more compatible with the new school of fencing. It should be stated that his attempt to create a new system failed to succeed. Master Danet divided his system of teaching into three steps:

1. Simple Play—exercises with the fencing master,
2. Two-sided Play—exercises with an active opponent,
3. Decisive Play—fights (loose play, training bouts)

Danet condemned catching the opponent's weapon, attempts to disarm the opponents, voltes and passes; he demonstrated them, however, but advised against using them. In fighting with sharp weapons, he advised avoidance of feints and compound actions. Further, he

recommended using circular parries in defensive and offensive actions (his advice has a certain significance in modern fencing, as well).

Danet's work met in turn with very sharp criticism, written by Mr. MX who—as it is now known—turned out to be no one else than the famous La Boissiere (the father), known for the introduction of a new and safer fencing mask (previously either no mask was used or only a carnival mask, which offered little protection).

In 1767, Danet wrote a second volume of his work in which, among other things, he replied to the criticisms of Mr. MX.

In spite of the fact that the new terminology proposed by Danet was not accepted, his system of teaching became generally accepted and considered as modern and efficacious. The second edition of Danet's book was officially accepted and recommended by the Royal Academy of Fencing and, for many years, was considered as a basic textbook on fencing, withstanding even the great shock of the French Revolution. The third edition of his work appeared in year IV of the Republic. In 1818, Danet's work was replaced by—a typical irony of fate—La Boissiere's son's book.

Returning to the great argument between Angelo and Danet: The infuriated Danet, having thrown out all restraint which ought to characterise an author writing about his professional colleague, burst out with indignation, writing:

I ought to be really pitied, if forced to imitate Mr. Angelo's drawings and theories contained in his treatise. In his principles, there is nothing new and nothing interesting, like in Girard's work, the mistakes from which he simply copied. One may defend one's own work, but not at the cost of truth. As far as my engravings are concerned, the originals of which are open for inspection, they are perhaps not so beautifully done as Mr. Angelo's but, unlike him, I do not have the financial support of two-hundred thirty-six English gentlemen. My drawings, however, are far more correct as far as the detailed presentation of my art is concerned. What reflections, what search were made by Mr. Angelo when everything that he could do was a repetition, using different words, mistakes and unnecessary strokes, of what we condemn in the old masters, and all which he can add from himself comes down to explanation of ridiculous bouts with rapier, cloak and lantern which, anyway, are used no more in Italy, nor in France nor England? I must admit, that all of this surprises me very much! [17]

Danet's anger must have had a slight negative influence on the clarity of his judgement and objectivity. If Angelo did not read Danet's work before suspecting him of plagiarism, then it is also possible that Danet did not get precisely acquainted with Angelo's work. The charge that Angelo copied the mistakes of Girard [18], an ex-naval officer, author of a textbook from 1736, was quite baseless. Girard, in contradistinction to the contemporary masters distinguished himself by a strange attachment to parries with the left hand, in spite of the fact that defence with the left arm was then generally criticised as not very efficient and quite dangerous. Angelo only once mentions parry with the left hand (in connection with "flanconade") and he does so with a certain hesitation, deeming the movement of the left hand as an additional insurance while executing a thrust with opposition; Danet, himself, accepted the use of the left forearm in similar cases. Angelo advocated evasion (dodging by a half-twist) to the right—"demi-volte"—rather than parrying with the left forearm.

Danet criticises and makes fun of all of Angelo's advice regarding rapier, lantern, cloak, etc., but: a) he does not notice that the great majority of Angelo's engravings and descriptions concerned classical fencing with a small sword; b) Angelo wrote for readers who very often visited the European continent and were subjected to the danger of assaults and armed fights with people who it would be difficult to consider gentlemen and who used various weapons and treacherous tricks; c) the examination for a fencing master's diploma in the Parisian Academy of

Fencing included fighting against six chosen fencing masters with small swords and also with rapiers and daggers.

Angelo did not entirely reject the overcoat or cloak since he thought that in case of assault by bandits one might rap the left arm in a cloak to use as a shield. The overcoat could assure good defence against a cutting weapon. Also, one could throw the overcoat over the opponent's head or weapon.

Angelo gave his pupils one more interesting bit of advice in case of a fight with bandits and robbers. He recommended directing the thrust, not to trunk, but to the face, explaining that people of suspicious character have a habit of putting under their clothes something which would protect them from injury by thrusts to the body. (Incidentally, wearing protective iron vests was considered very ungentlemanly. Once six Englishmen attacked a very famous Italian fencing master in London whom they disliked very much. The Italian master was not wounded because he wore a protective wire vest under his clothes. The fact that six armed men sneaked up on one man seemed quite acceptable, but they were most indignant at his indecency in wearing a protective vest.)

As mentioned earlier, the quarrels and misunderstandings between Danet and Angelo did not, in the least, deteriorate Angelo's position and fame and, perhaps, on the contrary, added to his prestige and popularity.

FINAL REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

“That which is in the present moment may be understood only as a consequence of that which was and is the embryo of that which will be.”

Jan Zieleniewski

Now a short summary with conclusions and reflections which prove that the above motto is true. Below are some comments in short points:

1. Getting to know the history of fencing, even in such a tiny fragment as this chapter, allows us to better understand the present state of fencing and to foresee its further development. For example, a conflict between conventional rules, poise, a certain artificiality of foil fencing in Angelo's time and the brutal reality of armed assault by dark characters, finds today its reflection in the conflict between conventional rules of foil and sabre (described exactly and formally in the FIE rules for competitions) and the sheer desire to score a hit and win the bout along with the ways in which the rules are applied by referees. As a matter of fact, the exaggerated artificiality of the conventional XIX century foil rules led to the introduction in fencing salles of a new practice weapon—epee—for which the rules correspond exactly with the rules of a duel. (In the second half of the XIX century, the artistic and highly conventional foil did not serve as a good preparation for duels, which were very common at that time.)
2. Domenico Angelo, teaching in London, and Danet, president of the French Academy of Fencing in Paris, were both among the most famous fencing masters of the XVIII century. They both, in their own, different ways, had a great impact on the development of fencing. Danet was a great innovator, introducing a lot of new, interesting and precious insights to theory, practice and methodology of fencing. Angelo was not an innovator: he represented a classical school, but his novelty and merit was in his treatment of fencing not only as a preparation for duels or armed fights, but also as a useful past-time and most excellent physical recreation. He created a wonderful fencing academy in London, was author of an excellent textbook and founder of a whole dynasty of fencing masters. He became, in a way,

an institution. He kept friendly relations with representatives of the English aristocracy and the world of culture and art. His unusual pedagogical abilities were used not only in fencing, but also in teaching horse-riding. He was very much interested in theatre and had plenty of friends and pupils among actors.

3. The introduction, by Angelo, of fencing exercises meant, not only as combat preparation, but as recreational sport, began the path to fencing as a sport and highly competitive activity at the end of the XIX century: the foundation of a fencing club of a new style, new methods and forms of fencing training, fencing competitions and championships, fencing at the Olympic Games, the development of national fencing federations and the FIE, women participating in fencing (recently in all three weapons).
4. Differences of opinion and hot discussions, even quarrels, very often constitute a creative element, aiding the development and better understanding of a given branch of human activity.
5. Some scientists working in sport theory should contemplate Danet's work, his creative innovations, bold conceptions and attempts to introduce new terminology. There are sport and fencing theoreticians who are afraid, like the devil of holy water, of new ideas or terms which are not in accord with their obsolete, old and dogmatic system of knowledge and practical abilities.
6. Angelo told his pupils that acquisition and application of defensive actions are far more important than skill in offensive actions. It is understandable when, in those times, a person could be forced to defend his own life with weapon in hand. This is why, for a long period of time, teachers of fencing paid special attention and devoted a lot of time and energy to teaching parries. In recent years, in competitive fencing, particularly important are offensive actions—above all, all kinds of attacks. Nowadays, they are most frequently used in competition and this is why fencing coaches devote a lot of time to teaching and perfecting attacks, neglecting the teaching of parries. This, of course, is a mistake and one-sidedness, as the psychological and technical base of an offensive and active style of fencing is confidence in unforeseen defence. This means that an active and offensive fencer preparing his attack must always be ready to take a parry or execute counter-attack in case of his opponent's unexpected attack.
7. Angelo was one of the first masters to insist on the importance of exercises with the left hand.
8. It is said that the type of weapon defines and influences the fencing. It is true. When the weapons were very heavy—for example, Mediaeval swords or unwieldy and very long rapiers—the fencing bouts were rather primitive. Only the introduction of the light, easily yielded, and rather short small sword brought fencing to the level of art. Technique, tactics, diversity of actions, mobility, speed and methodology of training attained a very high level. The types of weapons and variety of fencing equally influences the need of appropriate elements of physical fitness—appropriate energy and co-ordination abilities. A Mediaeval fight with a two-handed heavy sword demanded only a great mastery of strength and endurance. Fighting with rapiers already required better motor co-ordination, greater speed and more intense concentration of attention. Fencing with small swords and foils and then with modern duelling swords, “epees”, and contemporary sporting weapons very decidedly influenced the need to develop appropriate fitness abilities. So, as far as co-ordination is concerned, a fast, mobile fight with light weapons requires a very high level of co-ordination

abilities—including motor educability (ability to learn new strokes and change old strokes), motor control (accuracy of movement, precision and rhythm) and, above all, motor adaptability (choice of appropriate action in a given situation as a reaction to opponent's actions and change of tactical situation of a bout) and lightning speed motor improvisation (application of a stroke or sequence of strokes, in changing tactical situations with an active opponent, in a way never practised in that form). Contemporary fencing demands a specific and high level of development of energy fitness: increased significance of speed, power and specific endurance (resistance to perceptual fatigue, emotional fatigue, cognitive fatigue and physical fatigue). Of special importance are psychomotor qualities—i.e. psychological processes, strictly connected with motor activities: speed, accuracy and selectivity of perception on a higher, conceptual-functional level; various qualities of attention (concentration, range of attention, mobility of attention, shifting of attention, wide and narrow attention, external and internal attention); speed and accuracy of choices of decision; ability to change one's intention during the execution of a preconceived action as a response to the opponent's unexpected movement, etc.

9. So, it can be stated, once more, that knowledge of the history of fencing has not only great cognitive value but, of equal importance, practical and didactic worth.

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