

FIORE DEI LIBERI STUDIES DOCUMENTATION

Master Llwyd Aldrydd, OP

Introduction

Fiore dei Liberi's combat manual is the oldest surviving description of a *complete* European combat system. Earlier manuals such as Royal Armouries MS I.33 (circa 1320) and the Dobringer manuscript description of the Liechtenaur school focused solely on sword techniques. Fiore describes a complete, consistent, combat system building from wrestling, then adding a dagger, then adding longer range skills with a sword, longsword, pike, and spear. He describes applying the techniques to opponents in armor and while mounted on a horse. Each new scenario builds upon the earlier one and adds a few new, but consistent, movements that the new weapon or situation allows.

Most of what is known about Fiore as a person is extrapolated. He was Italian and born around 1350. He traveled extensively, studying swordplay from German and Italian masters. His technique clearly builds on, adapts, and updates or rejects, techniques described in Liechtenaur. But while the Germans are focused on grabbing and holding the initiative in a fight, Fiore advocated a counter-tempo approach where the opponent would initiate a combat pass and the skilled master would interrupt the attack – generally by stepping into the opponent before the attack can develop – and steal the initiative while the opponent is locked into his original attack.

Primary Source Material

Fiore authored one book describing his combat system which he started in 1409. Four copies of that manuscript are known to have survived to the present day. Each was hand copied, so there are subtle differences between the four and it is debated which differences were intentional – representing a change of mind on a technique – and which are scribal transcription errors. Some copies are also more complete than others.

The most accessible and complete copy of the book is called *Il Fior di Battaglia* (The Flower of Battle) or MS Ludwig XV 13 and is owned by the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles. An excellent hardbound facsimile reproduction of this volume, shown at right, is publically available with clear illustrations and very readable medieval Italian text as illustrated at the lower right. This copy is commonly referred to as “The Getty”.

The Pierpont Morgan Library in New York has another copy of the manuscript which is called “The Morgan”. Both the Getty and Morgan copies of the book are available as high quality scans on their respective museum's websites. The Getty images are released under a very liberal “Open Content” license and are the images used for my classes, flash cards, videos, etc.

Another copy resides in the French National Library. It is titled *Florius de Arte Luctande* and is in Latin. It is called either “The Florius” or “The Paris.” The final



known copy is titled *Flos Duellatorum*, is held in a private collection, and is referred to as “the Pisani-Dossi” or “the Novati”.

Secondary Source Material

Multiple translations of the medieval Italian text are available. The highest quality version was created and published by Tom Leoni in 2009. Others are publically available on sites like *Wiktenauer*. Colin Hatcher and Tracy Mellow have published a hybrid book which is laid out like the original Getty copy of the book but in which Hatcher’s English translation of the text has replaced the original Italian.

Tertiary Source Material

A wide variety of modern books have been written about or referencing Fiore’s combat system. The most comprehensive study and description of the system is Robert N. Charrette’s *Fiore dei Liberi’s Armizare*. Guy Windsor has published a series of volumes collectively titled *Mastering the Art of Arms*. Each volume focuses on a small portion of the full system in great detail. Recently a successful Kickstarter campaign was held to publish high quality reproductions of all four versions of the book with corresponding translations and commentary.

Understanding the Master

I was initially introduced to Fiore by Earl Brian from Darkwood Armory who gave a class on the subject during Pennsic peace week. I purchased a couple of books, a longsword, and off I went. After I bit, I assembled and taught my first Atlantian University class in 2013.

It became clear that I needed to work with other interested people in order to work through and understand the combat plays that Fiore describes. I twisted some arms in my local Barony and founded the Tir-y-Don Fiore Study Group. Our membership has fluctuated with as many as 10 people working though plays at a local fighter practice, but our core membership of 4 has been fairly consistent.

With 4 participants it is practical to have two waister-armed combatants and two advisors reading the Getty reproduction, Lioni’s translation, and Charrette’s interpretation. Informed by multiple decades of SCA and other martial arts experience it became possible to physically work through various ideas to gain an understanding of what moves the text is describing.

As we built that understanding, we continued to teach classes at Atlantian University. This was both to share our enthusiasm and to seek out alternate interpretations of the plays that we may not have considered. We now typically run a 4-hour track every other University with about 25% repeated introductory material and 75% new content since the last track. Illustrated at the right, I am demonstrating the “peasants blow” play for a University class.



Adapting the Master

While I am very interested in gaining a clear understanding of Fiore’s system as he describes it, I am also interested in adapting the techniques to be usable within the various SCA sport combat rules sets. Fiore’s system works: it will break and kill people. As we work through the plays slowly without armor, we also discuss how they could be used on the armored, cut and thrust, and rapier combat fields at full

speed. Most grappling is eliminated as is some targeting and types of attacks. For instance, no SCA form allows striking with a weapon's pommel or quillions. Half-swording is dropped for SCA-armored combat but retained for C&T and rapier. All of the study group members have been able to successfully integrate some of the Fiore techniques into their tournament repertoire.

I make heavy use of the counter-tempo strategy on the rapier field. I am frequently able to notice when my opponent has just committed to an attack. I can then interrupt that attack with my own during a brief period where it is very difficult for them to change the action that they have initiated.

Sharing the Techniques

One of the main subjects of the first Fiore class that I taught were his 12 Longsword Postas (positions). My class handout included images of all 12 positions along with their Italian and English names. Shortly, this evolved into a set of flash cards that I shared with the students. At the time, I was unclear as to the copyright status of the original images, so I asked Baron Aiden to work with me to take pictures of ourselves performing the stances. These images were then used on cards that I felt comfortable posting to my website (BaronLlwyd.org). Over time, I have created additional flash card sets for dagger postas, armored longsword postas, and for Italian glossary terms. Some of these images are shown at the right.



These flash cards can be used in a variety of ways. A single student can use them to review their understanding of the various names of positions. A solo drill can be created by shuffling the cards, selecting one to be the student's initial position and one to be their second position. The student steps forward, delivering a strike, as they move from the first position to the second. Then a new end position card is chosen. The student can repeat the drill while retreating or stepping sideways. This drill develops smooth flowing, but combat-effective, movement between natural move endpoints. A pair of students can drill by each selecting a flash card stance and discussing how first one and then the other could attack their opponent given their relative positions. This drill teaches the "rock-paper-scissors" of the system. This drill can be repeated at different ranges for additional understanding. Instructions for all of these drills and variations are included with the cards.

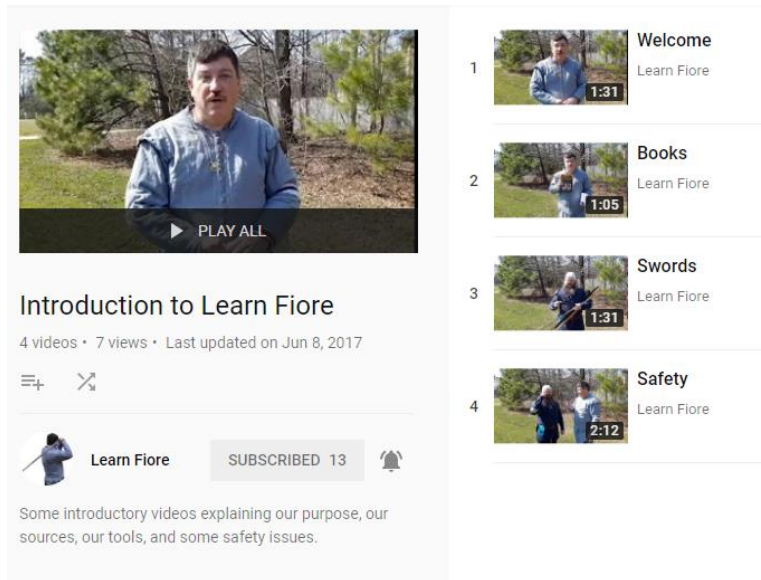
When we started advertising the University classes we received some interest from people unable to attend the event. One requested that we tape the class. Instead, we have been working to make videos of a wide variety of Fiore's plays which explain both the moves and their adaptation, if any, to SCA combat. We have made enough that we now have a Study Group website called LearnFiore.org and a corresponding YouTube channel (also called Learn Fiore) with play lists of all of our videos.

Learn Fiore

We now have a fairly consistent cycle where we study and work through some new plays, develop and teach a University class to improve our understanding, then shoot and post videos of the new work. From time to time we hold a photography shoot to use as source



material for a new set of flash cards. We have also started performing demonstrations at Atlantia's Kingdom Arts & Sciences Festival.



The image shows a YouTube playlist page. On the left, a large video player shows a man in a blue shirt speaking outdoors. Below the player, the title "Introduction to Learn Fiore" is displayed, along with "4 videos • 7 views • Last updated on Jun 8, 2017". Below the title are icons for a menu and a share function. Underneath is the channel name "Learn Fiore" with a "SUBSCRIBED 13" button and a notification bell icon. A short description follows: "Some introductory videos explaining our purpose, our sources, our tools, and some safety issues."

Introduction to Learn Fiore
4 videos • 7 views • Last updated on Jun 8, 2017

Learn Fiore SUBSCRIBED 13

Some introductory videos explaining our purpose, our sources, our tools, and some safety issues.

- 1 **Welcome**
Learn Fiore 1:31
- 2 **Books**
Learn Fiore 1:05
- 3 **Swords**
Learn Fiore 1:31
- 4 **Safety**
Learn Fiore 2:12

Fiore dei Liberi Bibliography

Learnfiore.org

Fiore de' Liberi's Fior di Battaglia M.S. Getty Ludwig XV 13 Italian Swordsmanship Treatise, Leoni, Tom, \$30, I have an edition labeled "rev 4". A later "2nd English Edition" is available from Freelance Academy Press. This is an excellent translation of the text from the Getty copy of Fiore. My copy has no illustrations at all.

Fiore dei Liberi's Armizare: The Chivalric Martial Arts System of Il Fior Di Battaglia, Charrette, Robert N., ISBN: 978-0-9825911-7-8, \$40, A fantastic exploration of Fiore's complete system with small reproductions of plates, lots of photographs, and very good explanations of the technique. It also compares the differences in illustrations between different surviving copies of the work. This is the main book that our group works from.

Il Fior Di Battaglia: MS Ludwig XV 13 (Italian Edition), Fiore Dei Liberi, ISBN 978-9527157114, \$30. This is an excellent reproduction of the Getty version of Fiore's book. Crisp illustrations, easy to read text (if you read medieval Italian).

Mastering the Art of Arms, Volume 1: The Medieval Dagger, Windsor, Guy, ISBN 978-1-937430-03-3, \$25. Overview of Fiore with an in depth look at his dagger plays. Forthcoming volumes will focus on other weapons.

Mastering the Art of Arms, Volume 2: The Medieval Longsword, Windsor, Guy, ISBN 978-952-68193-2-7, \$22. The second volume focuses on Fiore's longsword techniques.

Mastering the Art of Arms, Volume 3: Advanced Longsword – Form and Function, Windsor, Guy, ISBN 978-952-7157-06-0. Dives into more detail on longsword.

The Flower of Battle: MS Ludwig XV13, Hatcher, Colin and Mellow, Tracy, ISBN 978-0984771684, \$40. Hatcher's translation is combined with illustrations from the Getty to produce a copy of Fiore's manual as if it were written in modern English.

The Knightly Art of Battle, Mondschein, Ken, ISBN 978-1-60606-076-6, \$15. This book contains fantastic high resolution reproductions of the illustration plates from the Getty museum's copy of the manuscript. The descriptions are less useful to the combat student. This would be a great addition to Tom Leoni's translation of Fiore.

The Swordman's Companion: A Manual for Training With the Medieval Longsword, Windsor, Guy, ISBN 1891448412, \$22. This is an excellent modern adaptation of period Italian longsword technique based on Fiore dei Liberi and Filippo Vadi.