

A Brief Essay about the Traditions of the Occidental Martial Arts

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Abstract

The Occidental Martial Arts have been constantly used in wars with historical weaponry, from the ancient times until beyond the 2nd World War. The training in the usage of weaponry had been continuously conducted in military campuses and in various communities for “elite” and “folk” martial arts. Direct and indirect evidence indicate that the technical part of the training in the latter arts had always been rather simple (utilitarian), with emphasis given to the tactical usage of weaponry (conceptual). The relevant practices and concepts of fighting have been preserved in the Christianized Filipino Martial Arts, due to the predominant Spanish military influence, at least in the Portuguese art of Jogo Do Pau, in various European regions and in Sport Fencing. Nevertheless, some scholars believe that the Occidental Martial Arts have a broken line of legacy, mainly because of the lack of fighting manuals prior to the 13th century CE. In this paper, the author argues against this opinion.

Keywords: Occidental Martial Arts

I. Introduction

Rome, March of 537 CE¹. The kingdom of Ostrogoths had been in war with the Eastern Roman Empire (alias Byzantine)² for two years, since the Spring of 535 CE. General Flavius Belisarius (505-565 CE), commander-in-chief of the Imperial Army in Italy, has been sent there by Emperor Justinian I to re-conquest the land that once belonged to the fallen Western Roman Empire. King Witiges of Ostrogoths, with his army of at least 25,000 men strong, was marching against Rome. Belisarius had already decided to defend the “Eternal City” of 600,000 population. He had no more than 6,000 soldiers, among them about 2,000 bucellarii (his own excellent mercenary cavalry), equipped with the state-of-the-art weaponry of that era,

¹ CE: Current Era, alias AD.

² The term “Byzantine Empire” was coined by Hieronymus Wolf (1568) in his book titled “Corpus Historiae Byzantinae” (Margaris, [2010](#)).

financially supported and personally trained by him. Yet, this army was too small to defend the Aurelian Walls of the city, being at least 12 miles long with 14 major gates. So, he decided to form a militia by Roman citizens. He called up about 7,000 men, having just two weeks to train them for the oncoming battle. One year later, Witiges was forced to cease the siege of Rome and retreat North with heavy casualties (Chronopoulos, [2009](#); Graves, [1996](#); Kokkos, [2003](#); Procopius, [2008](#)).

Constantinople, January of 559 CE. King Zaverganis of the Koutrigur Huns, with his cavalry of 20,000 men, had crossed the frozen Danube River a month ago. They rapidly destroyed Thrace before they split. One part of this army turned southwest to plunder Greece. The other part of 7,000 selected Huns, led by Zaverganis himself, was heading towards Constantinople, the capital city of the Byzantine Empire (alias “Poli”)³. They encamped 20 miles away from the Great Walls. The Imperial Army was not there, being occupied in other fronts. The people were in panic and tens of thousands of refugees were crossing Bosphorus daily to the Asian side. Emperor Justinian, closed to his private chapel, was praying to God. Finally, though, he did one practical thing besides having the royal treasure loaded aboard his fleet, just in case. He called up the retired General Belisarius to – once again – save his imperial majesty from troubles. It had been ten years since the General had practically retired. Belisarius gathered 300 of his (volunteered to join) veterans, another 2,000 soldiers of the neglected Imperial Guard (with only 50 of them being properly equipped) and he also mobilized 1,000 villagers from the Thracian refugees in a descent physical shape. Guess what? Few days later at the battle of village Chettos, the Huns were defeated having 400 men killed, while Belisarius army suffered three dead and quite a few wounded men (Chronopoulos, [2009](#); Graves, [1996](#); Procopius, [2008](#)).

Illustrious Belisarius had become a legendary person in his own times: Count of the Empire; the very last person to be ever named Consul of the Romans; Lord of the Royal Grooms; Chief of the Imperial Guard and the most glorious General of the entire Byzantine era. He was used to fight outnumbered by the enemies throughout his life, since in most of his military career was in shortage of the valuable manpower. His men adored him and followed him in situations looking as bad as it could possibly be. Because of the comprehensive historical documentation of Belisarius military campaigns (Chronopoulos, [2009](#); Procopius, [2008](#)), the relevant sources provide a valuable direct and indirect example of the essence of the Occidental Martial Arts, to start with.

Nevertheless, some scholars believe that the Occidental Martial Arts have a broken line of legacy, mainly because of the lack of fighting manuals prior to the 13th century CE, despite the previous historical facts, demonstrating that people had been effectively trained for close-quarters combat and in a short time too. In this paper, the author argues against the opinion of a broken line of legacy by presenting the related historical and cultural context. But before that, we should consider some definitions for being necessary in the next section.

³ As the Greeks usually called it (and still do): “The City”. In their perception, every other city was something lesser.

II. Martial Typology

Before presenting a historical overview of the Occidental Martial Arts, some definitions are necessary for the clarification of the herein point of view. The term “Martial Arts” is perceived herein as three distinct types of arts:

- [1] The *military training*: It is focused on preparing the individual soldier for the battlefield. He has to learn how to use his equipment for protecting his life (self-defense) and for damaging the enemy. The usage of weaponry is practically unrestricted, depending on the era. The training methodology emphasizes team work.
- [2] The *combative sports*: The athlete has to function within a certain set of regulations, which aims at ensuring the physical safety and integrity of the contestants, along with the presence of a referee. The usage of weaponry is restricted to certain categories (namely those of the various sport-fencing arts). The training methodology is individualized.
- [3] The *civilian arts*: (this is a conventional label) that they usually appear in the form of self-defense or dueling. They smoothly bridge the gap between the two previous types of arts. In dueling, there can be a code of ethics and regulations present (Tavernier, 1884), yet the physical safety of the duelers is neither ensured not even desired. The variety of weapons can be historically substantial. In the self-defense forms, the training methodology may include group fighting, a feature that can make them readily available as military arts ([1]), under many circumstances.

Other classifications (Draeger, 1973; 1996; Draeger & Smith, 1980) may regard self-defense as a distinct type of martial arts, compared to dueling, yet my opinion is that self-defense is an activity that can be implemented by any of the previous types, although the [1] and especially the [3] type may be closer to it in terms of designing and training methodology. Some arts can be “purely” of one type, like military close-quarters combat such as MCMAP⁴([1]), competition wrestling ([2]) or Jeet Kune Do ([3]). Other arts though, like the Filipino Martial Arts (FMA), have versions for or activities in all three types.

According to my opinion, scholars usually neglect another parallel to the previous classification, having to do with the social context of martial arts application. Namely, martial arts should be also classified as either *elite* (“e”) or *folk* (“f”) arts. The former consist of a larger (usually recorded) curriculum, include a more sophisticated training and conceptual methodology, are usually (but not necessarily) practiced in institutions with a recorded lineage and require more time to comprehend. Yet in quantitative terms are lesser (i.e., comparatively less people have been involved throughout history). The latter consist of a smaller curriculum (usually of oral tradition), include a simplified training and conceptual methodology (usually based on the deception of the opponent), can be practiced within the family or a community of peers and take less time to master. Consequently in combination, six types of martial arts can be historically observed:

- [1e]: The training of Officers, professional soldiers or the elite branches of the Armed Forces throughout history (nobles, knights, special forces, etc.).

⁴ Marine Corps Martial Arts Program (e.g., see: <http://www.whatsafterboot.com/mcmap.asp>).

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- [1f]: The training of common soldiers, especially of recruits in military campuses.
- [2e]: The well-known dynamic sports that their practice and competition is organized within the framework of some sort of official institutions, such as the relevant National Federations or the Olympic Games.
- [2f]: Combative sports that are conducted within “informal” communities, such as the (European) Nordic Glima⁵, once. Due time they may become of [2e] type.
- [3e]: Most well-known and wide-spread martial arts (usually of Oriental origin), as practiced nowadays, belong to this category although they might have started otherwise.
- [3f]: They mainly look like (and conventionally are) simplified versions of the previous arts or combinations of them. We can observe typical examples of these arts in the Philippines, as part of the overall tribal culture (Wiley, [1996](#), pp. 105-115), but they are also present practically everywhere.

This is merely a core-classification, as far as an art (or a family of them, like FMA) may belong to more than one type. More specifically, combative sports ([2e/f]) may originate from military ([1e/f] or civilian arts ([3e/f]), while military and civilian arts may coincide, depending on the region and era.

The last issue to mention in this section is what constitutes an art and how an art differentiates from another. There are five conceivable martial components here:

- [A]. There is a set of tools (physical, natural, improvised or artificial weaponry)⁶ along with the associated techniques (ways) of usage. The techniques refer to the efficient application of tools against respective targets. That is how a martial arts technique can be actually perceived: the connection of a tool to a target (offensively) or the disconnection (defensively). This component is more global for the part that is based on human anatomy and on the similarity of weapon-design.
- [B]. There are preferred tactics that are linked with the techniques, addressing timing, distance and positioning (another global component). For example, wrestling arts prefer close-distance tactics that require good timing for “bridging the gap”⁷. Kicking arts prefer long-distance tactics, while mixed martial arts leave more room for self-expression. Some (if not most) of the composite techniques (especially in armed arts) are in fact tactics because they make heavy usage of timing and space (distance and positioning), according to the relevant definition of Tactics (World Soviet Encyclopedia, [1966](#)).
- [C]. There is a perception of combat within a particular conceptual framework. This is a notion that we will focus on later, as it is a distinct feature of the tradition of some “front-line” Occidental Martial Arts.
- [D]. The training methodology is a component that differentiates Occidental from Oriental Martial Arts. The former do not include at all predefined sets of techniques to be performed by a single person (forms). The forms are substituted by two-person drills

⁵ See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folk_wrestling.

⁶ According to the Jeet Kune Do (JKD) terminology (Kent & Tackett, [1988](#), p. 12).

⁷ Another popular term of JKD.

in Occidental Martial Arts, although there are Oriental exceptions mainly in Southern Asia. Sparring is also another main method of training in Occidental Martial Arts (Clements, [1999a](#)).

[E]. The cultural context is unique to every society and consequently marks accordingly the respective martial arts. Occidental Martial Arts are more homogenous in this respect, for historical reasons.

Any alteration in any of the previous components is enough for attaching a different tag to a martial art, at least as a different style. The issue of typology and definitions is a matter of extent and on-going debate (e.g., see: Clements, [2009a](#)) that will most certainly not be solved herein. I declare that this section is merely a subjective proposal for the reference to follow.

III. Historical Examples

An important element about the essence of the traditions of the Occidental Martial Arts is evident by the historical example of General Belisarius (see section 1). According to Procopius ([2008](#)), before the siege of Rome, each man of the mobilized Roman militia was trained in a single weapon, for example a spear. Technically, there are only two useful elementary techniques applied with a double-handed spear: the *thrust* (offensive) and the *beat* (defensive), which by the way are the same ones with a rapier that also includes a circular controlling technique (engagement/disengagement). The rest of the preparation is based on the tactical level, namely how the maneuver can complement or enhance the effectiveness of the spear. Individually, the user has to hit an enemy by using the length of this weapon as an advantage against shorter weapons, while staying at a safe distance. Against another spear, the beat can be used for deflecting an incoming hit. The user will also have to evade the attack before he counterattacks by stepping aside (a simple reasonable combat scenario). In this case, a lot of timing and footwork is involved. In group-tactics, the goal is to make a “wall” of spear-points in front of the group/phalanx that would keep the enemy at a distance, since such a tight formation would not be easily penetrable.

The previously described process is a [1f] martial art that is more conceptual ([C]), since it depends on a minimum number of techniques, while focusing on time and space management in order to nullify an attack (Tactics). Such a process though to be efficiently accomplished requires an equivalent training methodology ([D]), which will be based on making the maneuver more understandable to the trainee. This example is by no means unique. The Battle of Crecy (1346 CE) is another example of massively using soldiers (archers) trained mainly in a single weapon (the longbow) with decisive results (Barber, [2013](#); Nicolle, [2000](#)). In fact, the vast majority of persons who ever fought everywhere and under any circumstances in human history had (and have) been trained in folk martial arts. Is this tradition of the Occidental Martial Arts lost and in what extent?

IV. Commentary on Legacy

In general, it is believed that the Occidental Martial Arts (particularly the Renaissance ones) have a broken line of legacy (Clements, [2011a](#), p. 9). The reader, interested in this opinion, should understand the following issues:

- [i] Its advocates mostly refer to the type [1e] and [3e] martial arts that are documented in the numerous fighting manuals of Medieval and Renaissance times (ARMA, [1999b](#)). Whether we like it or not, there are also folk martial arts (type [1f] and [3f]), like the stick-fighting arts from the Canary Islands (e.g., see: Clements, [1999b](#)) that may not be documented at all.
- [ii] They claim indirectly that the only “scientific” way of studying a martial legacy is through documentation (Social scientists would have a lot to say about this). This attitude exhibits a profound ignorance about the immense endurance of folk traditions, in general. Every May, the people of the city of Coculo, Italy, celebrate the day of St. Domenico Abate with snakes (a lot of them), a pagan ritual of Marsi, a pre-Roman population of Italy (Elson et al., [2010](#), p. 14). It will take a PhD Thesis to report the pagan and Twelve God (of Olympus) rituals that are hidden in the festivities of Greek Orthodox Church (probably most of them) for honoring Christian saints. But to be more specific, this martial folk tradition is magnificently evident by the Portuguese martial art of Jogo do Pau, which is probably the earliest mentioned folk Occidental Martial Art (since the 14th century CE) by name. Luis Preto ([2010](#)) has written the first relevant manuals after seven centuries. The irony is that both the documentation of the art and the sport version of it, in an attempt to make it more popular, may cause changes that time didn’t: The thrusting hits with the pole finish the game quickly and in a less spectacular manner, so the swings are nowadays preferred⁸.
- [iii] The advocates also refer to the modern Sport Fencing as evidence of this broken line of legacy. The fact that the Medieval and Renaissance weapons are not used any more is an issue that affects only the component of tools ([A]) and partially the component of tactics that are associated with these tools ([B]). Why the conceptual framework ([C]) and the training methodology ([D]) are components less worthy of sustaining a martial lineage? I argue that these are more important components than the tools, which are global anyway, since the advocates of the opposite also state that (ARMA, [1999a](#), p. 16, 40): “*While there are core similarities and fundamental principles universal to the concept of armed combat that have remained unchanged ...*”. Thank you indeed! They also state that: “*There is no method of combat-effective teachings (i.e., devised for and intended for use in real combat) from these eras that has survived as a martial down to even the 18th century, let alone later times*”. I will provide enough evidence for the opposite opinion, regarding the folk type of Occidental Martial Arts (especially [1f] and [3f]), in the next sections.

⁸ according to Preto in a conversation with me.

The Ancient Greek military training was practiced by the Romans and Byzantines (Eastern Romans). There is a continuous existence of a martial culture and a normal succession of states that trained armies continuously participating in wars (e.g., see: Perkins, [2008-2009](#)). Folk martial traditions have a scholarly disadvantage and a practical advantage. Their disadvantage is that a lineage can't be traced by scholars, while their advantage is that this lineage can't be broken unless the entire community of practitioners is vanished. Of course, the practitioners don't care less about the studies of the scholars, since the art is a means of survival to them, while the scholars are useless respectively. To facilitate the presentation of the folk Occidental martial tradition (lineage), the relevant historical evidences are conventionally divided in two sections: the utilitarian tradition (section 5) that mainly refers to training practices ([D]) and the conceptual tradition (section 6) that mainly refers to the perception of combat ([C]).

V. The Utilitarian Tradition

This (utilitarian) training tradition was obviously applied inside the fences of a military campus or the equivalent locations. Starting from the (first recorded) beginnings, the depictions of the Egyptian tombs at Beni Hasan represent practically every common martial arts technique that we know of (locks, chocks, throws, etc.) plus stick/pole fighting (Newberry, [1893](#)). Ceremonial stick fighting is also depicted in tombs (No 19, 1400 BCE)⁹ of Egyptian Thebes (Burton, [1884](#)). This means neither that the Egyptians were the inventors of these techniques nor that everybody else learned them from the Egyptians. Similar findings were discovered later on (19th century BCE) in Mesopotamia and Persia (Dervenis, [2001](#), p. 21). By the 17th century BCE, the armies of Greece, Mesopotamia, Egypt, the rest of Middle East and the entire Europe used the same offensive and defensive weaponry (CoE, [2000](#)) with the same more-or-less methods of usage. It is an inevitable conclusion that weapons of the same design are also used in the same way (Dervenis K. in Dervenis & Lykiardopoulos, [2005](#), pp. 30-32). We don't need documentation for the latter conclusion; *trial-and-error* in combat is a great teacher: error causes death. Moreover, the safest way to train for combat is via dueling (Dervenis K. in Dervenis & Lykiardopoulos, [2005](#), p. 27), while the one and only safest way to train with bladed or sharp weapons is to simulate their usage with wooden substitutes or replicas. The practice of Egyptian stick/pole fighting remained alive at least since the times of Alexander the Great (Dervenis K. in Dervenis & Lykiardopoulos, [2005](#), p. 36) and probably even much later, since it was conducted as a religious celebration to honor God Horus.

There is no direct documentation that Ancient Greeks used sticks/poles in martial training, although it is reasonable to assume so (Dervenis K. in Dervenis & Lykiardopoulos, [2005](#), p. 36). We do know for example that they used the heavy boxing-bag filled with sand (*κώρυκος*) for their respective training. The Ancient Greeks are considered to have the phalanx perfected, although the Sumerians had made use of this military formation since 2500 BCE (Keegan, [1993](#), pp. 255-256). The free citizens (males that had the birth-right to vote) of the Ancient Greek city-states composed the Armies of their Democracies from the age of 18 to 60

⁹ BCE: Before Current Era, alias BC.

y.o. Usually the recruits (18-19 y.o.) and the veterans (46-60 y.o.) stayed back to guard the city, in case of a military campaign. This condition practically equates the Army ([1f]) to a militia ([3f]) even for Sparta, since its citizens had only one occupation: soldiering. Thus for many centuries in the Ancient Greek world, martial arts had been massively widespread. Their martial tradition ([C], [D] and partially [A] & [B]) remains regionally unbroken, as I will mention and argue below.

The Romans adopted the tactics of the Greeks, as they learned them from the Greeks of Southern Italy (Keegan, [1993](#), p. 552). We know that Romans were trained with wooden weapons (Dervenis K. in Dervenis & Lykiardopoulos, [2005](#), p. 36), a rational training practice that remained so until the Renaissance era (Clements, 1999b) and beyond. As the Roman Empire expanded all around the Mediterranean World, soldiers from all over had started serving to the Legions and killed in action at the service of the Empire: from Morocco and Syria (both killed on the Hadrian Wall); from Lyon killed in Wales; from Bologna killed in Germany; from Austria killed in Alexandria of Egypt (Keegan, [1993](#), p. 462). Not all the legionnaires were killed! When retired from service, they were awarded land to cultivate. Thus once again, martial knowledge was spread to the entire Empire. The Roman soldiers also used the pell (a man-height trunk planted in the ground) for training their strikes with a sword (Milner, [1993](#)). This training device, along with the associated practice, remained in constant use not only until the 19th century CE (Clements, [1999c](#)). We may see it for the training of the British colonial constabulary of India in the usage of their long stick or *Lathi* (Lang, [1921](#): Fig. 54 & 56) and for the “old way” training in FMA on suitable tree trunks of the nearby jungle (Papadakis & Gabriel, [2004](#)).

The Eastern Roman (alias Byzantine) Empire succeeded the previous status in every martial component. In such a context, the martial culture was kept alive by numerous instructors (military or civilian), practicing their art in a massive scale. It is rather absurd to believe that each generation of them would have to re-invent a combat-proven training curriculum, especially when the trainees frequently applied it in battle. The luck of (so far) discovered training manuals denotes nothing else but that there was no need for their martial tradition to be nothing else but oral, since it was both massive and alive. Indicative of the Occidental martial tradition is the Byzantine military manual (*Tactica*) written by Emperor Leo VI the Wise (865-912 CE), although it is not specifically about martial arts (see: Tabakakis & Zacharopoulos, [2011](#), p. 29)¹⁰. The unity of the Occidental martial tradition, also in this era until Renaissance (15th century CE), is demonstrated by the multinational composition of the Byzantine Army. Until 1066 CE, the Imperial Guard consisted of the Varangians (Scandinavian mercenaries)¹¹ and after that date mainly of Anglo-Saxon immigrants (Keegan, [1993](#), p. 400)¹², while Belisarius’ army included Hun horsemen and Persian archers (Keegan, [1993](#), p. 480). Then the Crusaders came along for about two centuries (Keegan, [1993](#), p. 494). They consisted of both elite troops (knights) and the less noble infantry (Keegan, [1993](#), p. 499). At the 4th Crusade (1204 CE), they conquered most of Greece and remained in the South and

¹⁰ and although this is also a matter of perception of this topic.

¹¹ Harald III Sigurdsson (alias Hardrada) had been an Officer of the Varangians before he became King of Norway from 1046 to 1066 CE: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harald_Hardrada.

¹² presumably because of the Norman conquest of England, after the Battle of Hastings (1066 CE).

Islands until the Ottoman conquest (15th century CE). From the 13th century CE onwards we started having the first known Western European martial arts manuals (for an introduction see: ARMA, [1999c](#)).

The oldest known manual of the Occidental Martial Arts is the “Royal Armouries I.33” (see: Tabakakis & Zacharopoulos, [2011](#), pp. 69-72), dealing explicitly with the magnificent and long-lasting system of sword-and-buckler (Clements, [2002a](#); [2002b](#); [2002c](#); [2002d](#)). Since the early 15th century CE, arms-masters had started writing (the so far known) martial arts manuals and teaching those civilians who had money and time to spend¹³. It is obvious to me that these manuals¹⁴ merely described an existing martial reality than inventing one. The contemporary masters tried to rationalize and ennoble the existing martial practice, influenced by the broader spirit of Renaissance: “*Writers on Destreza took great care to distinguish their "true art" from the "vulgar" or "common" fencing*”¹⁵. Thus, it is also evident that they were concerned with an elite category of martial artists. From there onwards, the Occidental civilian martial arts (dueling) took their own path of evolution with their typical weapon: the formidable rapier. Yet even then, this course was questioned and criticized by a contemporary arms-master: George Silver (see: Tabakakis & Zacharopoulos, [2011](#), pp. 67-69). In his book “Brief instructions on my Paradoxes of defence” (1599), he considered rapier as a weapon dangerous for its user and incapable of protecting him. He suggested slashing hits instead of thrusting ones with a sword/blade. The dynamic combat system presented in his book is focused on military applications and based on simplicity and effectiveness, according to the “traditional ways of combat”, which is really the historically interesting comment here. It is interesting because in the 16th century CE, Portugal and Spain started conquering Latin America and the Philippines (Keegan, [1993](#), p. 563). They did it by using their “traditional” martial methods and, in the case of the Philippines, the “Interrelatedness within the Martial Arts of Renaissance Europe” (Clements, [2009b](#)) was present in all aspects. The leader of the first Spanish expedition (1519-1522 CE) was the Portuguese Ferdinand Magellan and his crews (aboard five ships) of 260 persons (Leonardos, [2009](#), p. 349) were mainly from Spain and Portugal, but there were also sailors from Flanders, Sicily and the mainland Italy (Leonardos, [2009](#), p. 169) and Basques. The accompanying chronicler Antonio Pigafetta was Venetian (Leonardos, [2009](#), p. 84), the chief-gunners were Andrew from Bristol and the Norwegian Hans Bergen (Leonardos, [2009](#), p. 310) and there were at least five Greeks (Leonardos, [2009](#), p. 374). Three of the latter managed to survive among the 18 sailors who eventually returned from the first trip ever around the Globe (Leonardos, [2009](#), p. 18): The chief-navigator Francisco Albo from Chios, Michael from Rhodes and Nickolaos from Nafplio (Leonardos, [2009](#), p. 58), who was a professional boxer and wrestler (Leonardos, [2009](#), p. 232).

Up to now, the reader may think that Occidental martial tradition is “armed” and military. Yet, the European fighting systems were complete arts with and without weapons, as the relevant documents reveal (see: Clements, [2000](#)), since the Ancient Greek times (see: Dervenis & Lykiardopoulos, [2005](#)). In addition, they didn’t regard only soldiers or upper class citizens,

¹³ e.g., see: Fiore dei Liberi (in Tabakakis & Zacharopoulos, [2011](#), p. 53).

¹⁴ The interested reader should definitely start from the website of The Association for Renaissance Martial Arts (ARMA), at: <http://www.thearma.org/manuals.htm>.

¹⁵ See: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Destreza>.

but also lower class civilians on a massive scale (ARMA, [1999d](#); Clements, [2003](#)). Although the Christian Emperor Theodosius I officially prohibited the Olympic Games in 393/394 CE, because they were actually a religious celebration in honor of Zeus¹⁶ as were all the Ancient Greek sport festivities (Dervenis K. in Dervenis & Lykiardopoulos, [2005](#), p. 39), cases like that of Nickolaos from Nafplio (previously mentioned) were not unique. Professional wrestlers existed in the times of Belisarius (6th century CE), serving at the Imperial Army (Procopius, 2008). We have seen previously the endurance of folk traditions (section 4) and it seems that combative sports in Greece began to take an athletic instead of a religious character after the prohibition of Olympic Games, passing from [2e] to [2f] status.

To summarize, we have seen so far that the Occidental tradition of martial training includes the usage of a dummy opponent (the pell), of wooden weapons and of sparring. The last method to mention is the two-person continuous circular drills. In Europe, these drills (single stick) survived through the continuous legacy of the Portuguese [3f] martial art Jogo Do Pau (Preto, [2013](#)). We may also see them as a predominant training practice of FMA, called *give-and-take* or *counter-for-counter* drills (Presas, [1983](#), pp. 90-93). They are identical because of the Spanish conquest of Philippines and the exerted military influence on the training methodology of the Christianized FMA, which will be further commented in section 7. The 16th century CE was a turning point for martial arts in Europe: the usage of fire-arms (arquebuses and muskets) increasingly appeared on the battlefields (Keegan, [1993](#), p. 554). The gradual abandonment of the previous variety of weaponry and of their associated skills may lead some people to think that the older martial tradition became extinct altogether (ARMA, [1999c](#)). Once again, this hypothesis is inaccurate for folk martial arts, since it refers only and partially to [A] and [B] martial components. In section 7, we will see a presentation of what has survived, until when, where, how, why and by whom¹⁷.

VI. The Conceptual Tradition

There are four concepts of fighting, explicitly expressed in Occidental Martial Arts, which are diachronic. These four concepts suffice adequately for the needs of combat, regarding: favorable targets, i.e., where to strike (1st concept); how to perceive defense (2nd concept); where and how to move in combat (3rd concept); the extent of the previous ones in combat applications with a variety of tools (4th concept).

The 1st concept defines most preferable (easy) targets, which are the limbs. It obviously originates from the necessity to strike whatever is exposed from the protection of a large shield. This concept is evident since the Ancient Greek wars by the shin-guards for protecting the lower part of the legs (Connolly, [1978](#), pp. 15, 27, 28, 39), which are exposed below the large Greek shield (*hoplon*), clearly denoting that the leg was a favorable target. The Greek historian Dionysius of Halicarnassus (c. 60 BCE – sometime after 7 BCE) wrote about a battle of Romans against Gauls in 436 BCE, where the legionnaires “would cut the tendons of their knees¹⁸ and topple then to the ground” (Anglo, [2000](#), p. 108). The concept is also indirectly

¹⁶ e.g., see: <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/Olympics/faq11.html>.

¹⁷ Applying Systems Theory for Martial Arts (Papakitsos & Katsigiannis, [2015](#), pp. 26-27).

¹⁸ of the Gauls.

visible in ancient mosaics of the gladiators' era, like the magnificent one in Galleria Borghese, Rome (Elson et al., [2010](#), p. 83), where the armed right hand, as well as the front-placed left foot of a gladiator, is well protected from strikes (also see: Christodoulou, [2001](#), p. 10). The European fighting manuals are also quite revealing in this respect. In Talhoffer ([1459](#), pp. 176, 262, 263), we can see a “defensive” attack with a sword to the adversary's hand, which may cut the entire palm off. In another anonymous work of early 15th century CE, the “Poem of the Pell” (in Clements, [1999c](#)), it is stated as training/fighting guidelines¹⁹ directly that “*Strike as if cutting to his hands, legs, thighs, and arms*” (Line 27) and indirectly that “In cutting out the right arm and side are exposed” (Lines 36-37). In 1470 CE, the Ottoman Turks besieged the Greek city of Chalcis, ruled by Venice, which eventually fell. The Venetian infantrymen, holding with their left hand an almond-shaped shield, had their front-placed left leg fully armored (thigh; knee; shin; foot) like a Medieval Knight (Kakavelakis, [2000](#), p. 18). The notorious Florentine political philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527 CE) describes in the Battle of Ravenna (1512 CE) how the Spaniards (holding their bucklers) got under the pikes of the Germans and made use of their swords in close-quarters against the helpless pikemen (Machiavelli, [1521](#), pp. 31-32). The 18th century CE broad-sword fighting manual of Henry Angelo includes two occasions of leg protection (Angelo, [1798](#), pp. 12, 16). In the 19th century's CE dueling, the hand was regarded as a secondary but nevertheless easy target (Tavernier, [1884](#), p. 85). In the combat manual of the Hellenic Cavalry of 1914 (Hellenic Ministry of Military Affairs, [1914](#)), one of the proposed target is the reins-holding hand of the enemy horseman. Finally in FMA's terminology, this predominant fighting concept is called the principle of *Destroying the Fang of Snake* (Papakitsos, [2001](#), p. 5) or simply *Defanging*²⁰, where the snake is a metaphor for the limbs. The respective long-range fighting style is *Larga Mano* (Wiley, [1996](#), p. 354). It should be mentioned though that limbs are more suitable targets for weapons with slashing capabilities.

The 2nd concept is the perception of attacks, which are classified according to the trajectory or the targeted area of the attacking weapon. This concept is visible in the old manuals (Pic. 1), as well as in Sport Fencing (Pic. 2). The direction of the incoming weapon is depicted by an area. In modern Sport Fencing, the areas were simplified to four (Pic. 2b) instead of the earlier eight (Pic. 2a). The consequences of this concept define mainly the defensive actions according to the offensive line. By the way, especially the simplified version (Pic. 2b) clearly resembles the concept of “the four gates”, as perceived in Wing Chun Kung-Fu (Lee, [1972](#), p. 24)²¹. The respective counterpart in FMA is the principle of “the angle of attack” (Magda, [1995](#), p. 17), where *angle* is the attacking line. This principle in traditional FMA differentiates the number of the angle (*angulo*) according to the nature of the strike. Namely, the same line can be denoted by a different number if the strike is a slash and by another number if it is a thrust (e.g., see: Presas, [1983](#), pp. 36-43; Somera, [1998](#), pp. 70-84). The traditional angles are 12 (Inosanto et. al., [1980](#), p. 38) but the modern simplified practice usually includes only the first five of them (Fig. 1).

¹⁹ In Modern English interpretation.

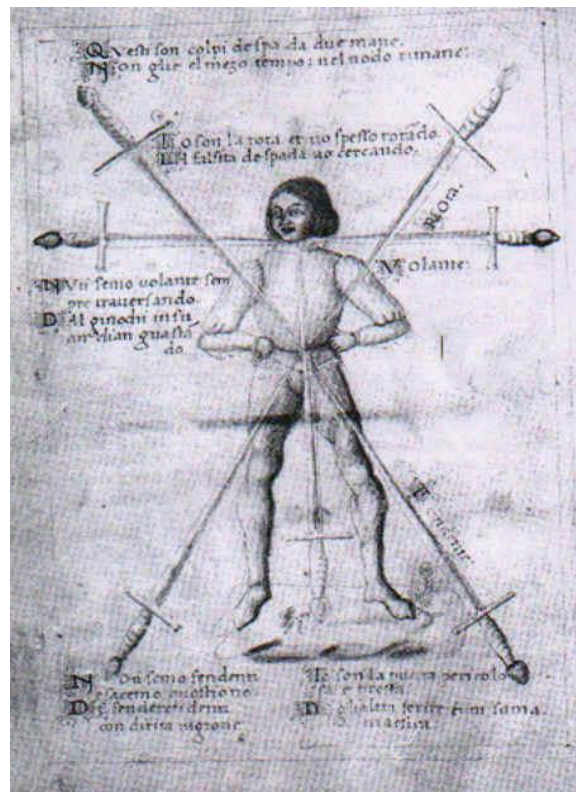
²⁰ The Americans have a strong language tendency to cut terms down.

²¹ Namely: 6th = Outside High; 4th = Inside High; 7th = Inside Low; 8th = Outside Low.

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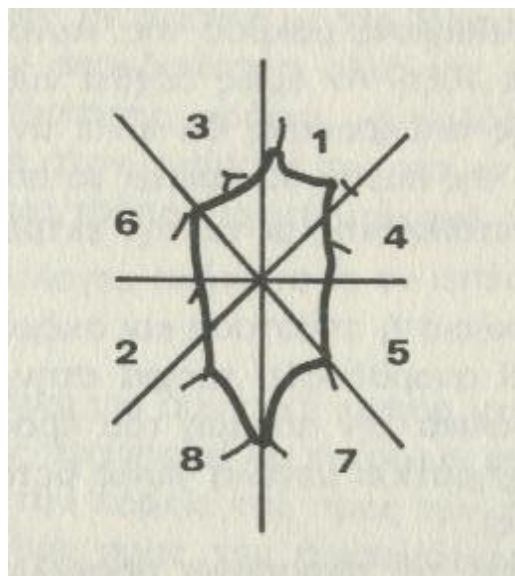


Folio 32 – Fior Battaglia MS Ludwig XV13, code(x) Getty.

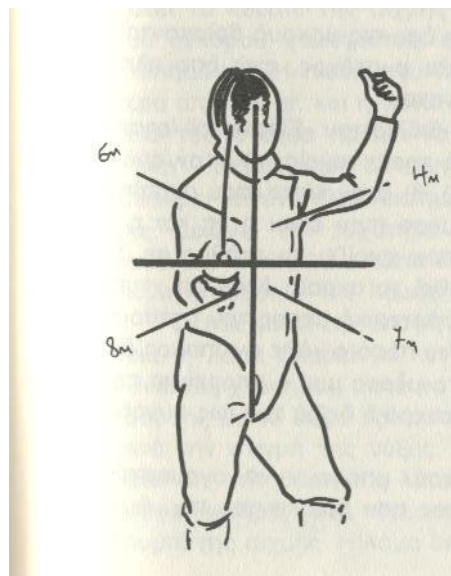


Signo (Vadi, 1482-1487).

Picture 1. The lines of attack in old European fighting manuals (also see: Tabakakis & Zacharopoulos, 2011, 54 & 60).



a. The older enumeration (Doubalakis, 1990, 94).



b. The simplified enumeration (Doubalakis, 1990, 69).

Picture 2. The areas of attack in Sport Fencing.

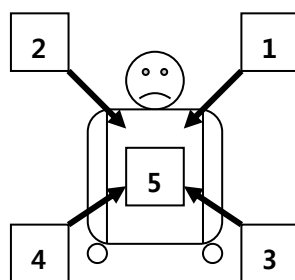


Figure 1. The first five angles of attack (Papakitsos, 2001, 4).

The 3rd concept is the lack of formal stances in the sense that they are perceived by Oriental Martial Arts: a “frozen” moment of the practitioner. In the Occidental perception of fighting, the emphasis is given to mobility. Thus, the types of stepping are defined instead (Doubalakidis, [1990](#), pp. 41-61). FMA exhibit an equivalent lack of stances, since a stance is merely a momentary position during the combat maneuver. The footwork consists of various stepping patterns that are geometrically described as triangles (e.g., see: Inosanto et. al., [1980](#), pp. 63-75; Wiley, [1994](#), pp. 60-61).

The 4th concept has to do with the validity of the previous concepts regardless of the type of weaponry. Namely, the preferable targets (1st concept), the perception of combat through the lines of attack (2nd concept) and the footwork (3rd concept) remain essentially the same regardless of the used tools. Once again in FMA terminology, this is called the *Substitution Principle*, dictating that we should plan our fighting behaviour according to the lines of attack (2nd concept) and not so much according to the tools/weapons, after a proper adaptation (Papakitsos, [2009](#), pp. 3, 11). This principle tremendously unifies, simplifies and speeds training up. The European martial manuals indirectly indicate its use, since the lines of attack are depicted through swords (Pic. 1), which were very common but not the only used weapons. Even John Clements of ARMA would have his self-claimed Epiphany (Clements, [2009c](#)) at least a decade earlier, if he had just – not study but – surf around the internet on FMA sites²². In FMA methodology, the training begins with the stick (about 70 cm / 2.5 ft. long), which is a weapon itself, a substitute for anything else of the same length (axe; machete; short sword) and a teaching tool for learning combat principles. Even the training in Filipino Boxing (Panantukan) may traditionally begin with the stick (Magda, [2009](#)). The application of these concepts proceeds also to combinations of weapons. According to Clements ([2011b](#)): “In 1892, the Oxford University Fencing Club presented a demonstration and lecture by club president Sir Frederick, ‘explaining the transition of swordsmanship from the old English Sword and Buckler fight to Rapier and Dagger’...” Similarly, many people perceive the FMA practice of *Espada y Daga* as such (sword & dagger). Once again, it is also a reference point for training in a combination of a main weapon and a supportive one or in two weapons of different length²³.

²² No offence; it is a pity for anyone to straggle for years re-inventing the wheel, when the wheel is in front of him.

²³ e.g., stick & dagger; sword & shield; long & short stick; axe & dagger; axe & shield; sword & axe.

VII. The Preservation of Lineage

We have seen so far the unbroken lineage of the Portuguese Jogo Du Pau since the Medieval era. Once isolated in rural areas of Portugal, it is becoming popular again nationwide. The author also claims that the entire essence of the Occidental martial tradition has survived through the FMA, because of the profound Spanish influence, which is documented at least in three cases:

- The Spanish terminology of FMA: *eskrima/escrima, espada y daga, mano y mano, disarmas, baston, abierta, serrada, anggulo*, etc. (e.g., see: Somera, [1998](#), pp. 132-133; Wiley, 1994, pp. 149-151). In Wiley's Glossary ([1996](#), pp. 351-356), 27 out of 130 terms (21%) are of Spanish etymology. Of course, this alone can be attributed to the function of Spanish as the *lingua franca* of the Philippines for three centuries (17th – 19th centuries CE).
- The practice of those martial arts having a Spanish terminology, mainly as tribal arts, by Christianized groups only (Galang, [2000](#), p. 4; Nepangue, [2001](#), pp. 11-12; Reyes, [2001](#), p. 130).
- The historical recording of military training of certain Filipino ethnic groups (e.g., the Pampangas) in Spanish military schools. According to the Spaniard historian Fray Casimiro Diaz, referring to the Filipino revolution of 1898-1899 CE (in Galang, [2000](#), pp. 5-6): “[*Their rebellion*] was all the worse because these people had been trained in the military art in our own schools, in the fortified posts of ...” This is the most clear and direct historical report about the origins of some Christianized FMA.

The FMA tradition has been “distilled” in a more conceptual manner through its export to the USA and its wider propagation initially by the Jeet Kune Do (JKD) Martial Arts clan (e.g., see: Inosanto et. al., [1980](#)). It is because of this path that the Occidental martial features, long hidden in the FMA, became clearly visible once again and comparable to the remaining of the features of Sport Fencing, which is one of the three core martial arts of Jun Fan/JKD (Papakitsos, [2008](#), p. 5). The 2nd fighting concept of Occidental Martial Arts along with its respective counterpart in FMA (section 6) is unique among the neighboring to FMA martial arts of South East Asia (Indochina; Indonesia; Malaysia). Although the affinity of FMA to the rest of them is more than obvious for three martial components ([A], [B] and [E]), the other two ([C] and [D]) are distinct. It is my opinion that in this respect, Christianized FMA are a modified version²⁴ of *La Verdadera Destreza*²⁵. This topic though deserves an explicit article in future.

Another topic worthy of separate presentation is the martial lineage of Eastern Europe. All the presented literature for Renaissance Martial Arts in Europe regards writers of Western Europe (see: ARMA, 1999b). For example, besides the infamous and rather misunderstood ancient art of Pankration (Dervenis & Lykiardopoulos, [2005](#)), there is also a martial legacy of

²⁴ Simplified for adapting to the local social context.

²⁵ See: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Destreza>; <http://www.destreza.us/translations/ettenhard.html>.

short blades (short and long knives) in Greece (Dervenis, 2003), which has been historically continuous since most ancient times. With the permission of the editor and the reviewers of this journal, I will leave this piece of work for another article, since this one is already becoming too long for a patient reader.

We saw earlier that the mid-16th century CE had been a turning point for the Occidental Martial Arts, because of the gradual introduction of personal fire-guns (arquebuses and muskets) in warfare (section 5). Soldiers had started abandoning older weapons that became ineffective in battlefield. By the end of the 17th century CE, muskets had become more easy to use, even in a humid environment (Keegan, 1993, p. 565). The muskets were still slow to reload and the quick charge of the enemy cavalry could inflict severe casualties to infantry musket-men. For this reason, the European armies retained a ratio of one infantry lancer per two musket-men. Both could be armed with a sword as an auxiliary weapon. The lancers kept the cavalry away, although the two specialties (i.e., lancers and musket-men) could not operate within the same combat-unit. This inability of cooperation caused chaotic conditions on the battlefield (Keegan, 1993, p. 566). So far, we know that the old armies²⁶ deployed lancers on the battlefield in a historical continuance. Why should anyone think that the training of the Renaissance infantry lancers was any different than the one of Belisarius' Roman militiamen? (Section 3). The chaotic situation changed with the invention of the bayonet²⁷ that the European infantries fully adopted in the 18th century CE. Any soldier became both a lancer and a musket-man (Keegan, 1993, p. 567), being trained in the usage of both weapons, as a "firing-lance" (musket & bayonet) that was used extensively until the 19th century CE and beyond²⁸. This fact alone is enough to counter any broken-legacy arguments ([iii]) and there is a bit more to come²⁹. A typical musket with its bayonet fastened on could be more than 2 meters long (about 7 ft.). By the end of the 19th century CE, rifles replaced muskets. Although less important in combat, the "firing-lance" saw extensive use during infantry charges in World War I (1914-1918 CE) and at least by the Greek Infantry at the beginning of World War II (1939-1945 CE). During the counter-attack of the Greek Army that made the Italian Army to retreat deep in Albania (1940-1941 CE), legendary battles had been fought with the use of bayonet (Bourlas, 2011), because ammunition run out quickly and the re-supply was very difficult in a terrain without roads. The lance itself was also used massively by the Polish Cavalry in World War II at the Battle of Poland (1939 CE), hopelessly against the German tanks. Since then, thousands of European NCOs³⁰ keep the lineage of spear alive, because it is still a combat training topic and a genuine [1f] martial art, as far as in many European countries (including Greece) the military service is still mandatory for every male citizen.

Another continuous [1f] martial tradition that remained in combat practice until World War II is the training of the Cavalry to the usage of the sabre (e.g., see: Angelo, 1798). The case of using the sabre in duels concerns also Tavernier (1884, pp. 31, 194), as to whether or not is it ethical for a civilian to challenge a Cavalry Officer (who is trained in the sabre) by

²⁶ Prehistoric; Ancient; Medieval; Renaissance.

²⁷ In Greek it is literally called "sword-lance" (*ξιφολόγχη*).

²⁸ Even in the War at Afghanistan that started in 2001 (see: Rayment, 2004).

²⁹ See also: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bayonet>.

³⁰ Non-Commission Officers (NCOs) usually have the duty of training the recruits in the usage of weaponry and other equipment.

choosing the rapier as the weapon of the duel. Another example is revealed in the training and tactics manuals of the Hellenic Cavalry (see: Hellenic Ministry of Military Affairs, [1912](#); [1914](#); [1934](#); [1936](#)). This tradition is connected to a conceptual framework that is evident in folk Occidental Martial Arts. The usage of the sabre occupies only a couple of pages of those manuals, with a few guidelines regarding merely where to strike and how³¹. The rest of the art was again not necessary to be written down, since the trainer's duty of the Cavalry's NCOs was accomplished as a living tradition, from one generation of trainers to the next, until World War II.

VIII. Epilogue

The Occidental Martial Arts have been constantly used in wars with historical weaponry, from the ancient times until World War II and beyond. In long periods of time, the martial training in the usage of historical weaponry had been continuously conducted in military campuses and locations, but also as a folk tradition that also includes folk combative sports ([2f]). Consequently, martial arts can be socially classified as elite and folk arts. Because of the advances in weapon's inventions, the utilization of many of the old weapons were abandoned, with the practice of the sabre and the spear/lance (as a combination of rifle & bayonet) to be the most long-lasting ones. The mandatory military service of the male citizens in many European countries makes the latter a genuine folk military art ([1f]), along with folk civilian martial arts ([3f]) that still survive regionally. The technical part of their training has always been rather simple (utilitarian), while emphasis has been given to the tactical usage of weaponry (conceptual). This martial tradition is as legitimate as any other, being marked by a different perception of legacy. The relevant practice and concepts have been also preserved in the FMA, because of the predominant Spanish military influence.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the people of ARMA for discovering, gathering and making available to the public many literature sources of Occidental Martial Arts. Although I disagree with some of their opinions, I feel that they deserve the congratulations of the martial arts community for their laborious effort. I would also like to express my thankfulness to Mrs. S. Katakaki for the gratuitous typing of the text.

³¹ e.g., "Like a saw" (... *δίκτην πριόνος* ...).

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