

Mondschein, Ken. <i>The Knightly Art of Battle</i>. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011. Pp. 128. \$14.95. ISBN: 978-16-0606-0766.

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The J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles holds an important example of a *Fechtbuch*, a title applied to fighting and fencing manuals of the late medieval and early modern period. The manuscript, MS Ludwig XV 13, is the *Fior di battaglia*, written by Fiore dei Liberi around 1410. The work is the earliest known example of a *Fechtbuch* written in Italian, and its opening page indicates it was dedicated to Niccolò d'Este. Three further copies of the work are known, another two in Italian (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library MS M 383, and the Pisani-Dossi manuscript in private hands), and one in Latin (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS Lat. 11269). Two further copies are now lost but are known to have been held in the library of the d'Este family.

Of the manuscripts that survive, MS Ludwig XV 13 is, according to Mondschein, "not only the most complete but also by far the finest." This is largely because of the quality of the line drawings that accompany the text. All of these can be seen online on the Getty Museums website at <http://www.getty.edu/art/gettyguide/artObjectDetails/artobj=1706>. Strangely, Mondschein does not list in his bibliography the full printed edition and study of Getty MS Ludwig XV 13 by Massimo Malipiero in 2006. This is odd, given that this book (*Il fior di battaglia di Fiore dei Liberi da Cividada: il codice Ludwig XV 13 del J. Paul Getty Museum*) was published in association with that museum.

Mondschein's book contains only a selection of images from the manuscript and short commentaries on each image shown, together with an introduction. Usefully, however, he comes to the subject not only with academic knowledge of *Fechtbücher* but also practical experience in historical fighting techniques, being research fellow and fencing instructor at the Higgins Armoury Museum in Worcester, Massachusetts. He begins with a short introduction on the work and its author. Fiore dei Liberi hailed from Friuli. We know from his own admission in the Pisani-Dossi version that he had spent fifty years in the practice of arms, having begun his studies at the age of 10. We find him inspecting the city arsenal of Udine in 1381, as well as tutoring many noblemen in fencing. His *Fior di battaglia* was most likely intended as an *aide-memoire* for those who were learning, or who had already learned, the art of fighting, rather than as an instruction manual per se. It was a carefully planned book where the line drawings were intended as an integral element. Fiore tells us that he knew how to "read, write and draw," and there has been some suggestion that he drew the pictures himself. However, it is more likely that MS Ludwig XV 13 was the product of professional scribes and artists even if they were working from drafts drawn by Fiore himself. Fiore's work can also be seen to have inspired other *Fechtbücher* in the later fifteenth century.

Mondschein's book is intended not as a complete study but rather as "a visual tour of the Getty manuscript," aimed at a wider audience including those involved in recreating

medieval fighting systems. It takes us through several types of fighting, following the order in which they are found in the full text. The first is wrestling. Interestingly, Fiore states in the prologue to the Getty manuscript that he had begun the book as Niccolò d'Este had instructed him-- with *abrazare* (wrestling). Castiglione also recommends in the *Book of the Courtier* that it is important to know how to wrestle since it was "a great help in using all sorts of weapons on foot." Mondschein shows how the various tactics of wrestling assisted in this, providing a useful commentary under each of the illustrative examples chosen. He then moves to other examples of self-defense, such as how to loosen the grip of an opponent on his dagger. The line drawings in the manuscript even include an illustration of the best places on the body to target with a dagger.

Techniques of combat with the sword then follow. Particularly interesting are the drawings on folio 22v (here on page 47) of the positions for use whilst wearing armour, which also show how all the parts of the sword could be used as a weapon: "a combatant could use the quillons (cross-guard) as an axe, smash with a pommel, or use the whole blade as a lever in grappling." Twelve positions for the two-handed sword are demonstrated. There follows a fuller discussion of fighting in armour: not surprisingly, the styles of armour portrayed in the different versions of the *Fior di battaglia* are a means whereby they can be dated. Other forms of weapons, such as the poleaxe, are also illustrated both against an opponent fighting on foot and on horseback. Equestrian combat between two mounted men is also illustrated, where Fiore suggests the best positions for weapons to be held and also how opponents might be thrown from their horses by use of wrestling techniques. Mondschein ends with examples, taken from various places in the book, of what he calls "dirty tricks" and improvisation. These include the tying of a rope between the saddle and the butt of the lance. After striking an adversary, one could hold the rope taut and "clothesline" one's opponent from his horse.

This is a fascinating little book with well-produced illustrations on glossy paper. It will be attractive to museum-shoppers and aficionados of medieval combat who would not wish to plough through Malipiero's 500-odd pages. But it is no substitute for the academic reader. It is particularly frustrating that Mondschein does not explain the structure of the book as a whole very clearly. However, his selections demonstrate effectively how seriously training for combat was undertaken in the later middle ages.

My reply follows:

I would like to thank Professor Curry for her kind words; to have a scholar such as she praise my work is most gratifying. However, I can not take full credit for *The Knightly Art of Battle*, as it was really a group effort. Elizabeth Morrison, Curator of Manuscripts at the Getty; Greg Britton, the former publisher; and Kurt Hauser, our designer, are at least as responsible as I am for its style and content.

I wrote *The Knightly Art of Battle* at the Getty's behest in about a week. There was a need in this popular-audience work to limit my foreign-language bibliography, which is why neither Malipiero's book, nor that of Rubboli and Cesari, are mentioned (though I did

manage to slip in Cavina, whose work I think should be more widely known). It is not the book I would have written if we lived in a world designed by Rousseau, but it is a means of testing the scholarly and popular waters for the feasibility of a full translation and study of all four of Fiore dei Liberi's fascinating manuscripts (besides being a painless introduction to medieval warfare for undergraduates). I therefore exhort anyone who would be interested in seeing such a work to order a copy of *The Knightly Art of Battle* for themselves and/or the school library.

Yours,

Ken Mondschein