

# Notes on Bibliothèque Nationale MS Lat. 11269, *Florius de Arte Luctandi*

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A recently discovered manuscript by the Friulian fencing master Fiore dei Liberi (fl. c. 1383–1410), Bibliothèque Nationale MS Lat. 11269 is discussed and compared with other known copies. Authorial intent, the style of arms, armour, and other military equipment depicted, and the dating and style of the manuscript are also discussed.

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Until recently, three manuscript copies of the earliest known Italian treatise on the arts of chivalric combat, the *Flos Duellatorum* of the Friulian fencing master Fiore dei Liberi (fl. c. 1370–1410), have been known to scholars: Morgan Library M.383, Getty Museum Ludwig XV 13, and the Pisani-Dossi version, now in private hands, which was published by Francesco Novati in 1902.<sup>1</sup> A 58-leaf version made for Niccolò d'Este and catalogued as d'Este family library MS 84, as well as a 15-leaf version catalogued as MS 110, are now lost.<sup>2</sup>

To these manuscripts, we must now add Bibliothèque Nationale de France MS Latin 11269. That this copy of Fiore's work has been previously overlooked is not surprising: It was catalogued as *Florius de arte luctandi* and, unlike the other known versions, the couplets that describe the various martial techniques shown in the book are written in literary medieval Latin, not Friulian dialect.<sup>3</sup> The only other instance of Latin in the Fiore manuscript tradition is the first of two prologues on folio 2r of the Pisani-Dossi. Though the hands are similar, it is unlikely that this page was originally detached from the Paris manuscript, as it is followed immediately, in the same column, by a vernacular introduction.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Novati described the former as unbound pages,<sup>5</sup> whereas the latter seems to be an integral, bound work (as described below). In addition to its use of Latin verse, the Paris manuscript is notable for its lavish illustrations and because, unlike the others, the figures are placed in naturalistic space by the addition of ground under their feet.

Most of what we know of the life of Fiore dei Liberi has been gleaned from the information he gives us in the prologues to his manuscripts. He was born in the middle of the fourteenth century to a knight named Benedetto, lord of the town of Premariacco, located in the duchy of Friuli in the diocese of the Patriarch of Aquileia. Russell Howe has persuasively argued that Fiore was from the rapidly diminishing class of *liberi milites* descended from Imperial administrators of the region. This would certainly fit with his reference to having studied with German masters in the Pisani-Dossi prologue. Zanutto places him on the Udinese side in the 1381–89 Friulian civil war,<sup>6</sup> and Fiore apparently enjoyed some popularity as a master of arms amongst the nobility, as is shown by the number of knights and squires he claims to have trained in the prologues (including Galeazzo di Mantua for his famous combat with the French knight Boucicault in 1395). The last students he mentions teaching appertained to the Visconti court, but Fiore is most associated with Niccolo d'Este, to whom the Getty and Pisani-Dossi manuscripts are dedicated.

The identification of the Paris manuscript as Fiore's work is beyond a reasonable doubt: Even if the author's identity were not given in the final verse on folio 44 verso, upon examination the combative system itself is instantly revealed to be Fiore's, for there is clear repetition of techniques and terminology such as the 'woman's guard', even if the elaborate costumes worn by the armoured combatants are somewhat different and the Latin verses are not direct translations of the vernacular poesy found in the other copies. The content of the Paris example — the martial techniques described — is mostly also found in the other MSS. (None of the four manuscripts contain all 319 of Fiore's martial techniques, which may be assumed to derive from a yet-unknown master copy, presumably MS 84.)

The method of pedagogy in MS 11269, though not explained in this manuscript, is also similar to the other versions: The figures demonstrating the initial fighting techniques in a sequence are illuminated with gilt crowns, whereas those showing follow-up techniques wear gilt garters and those showing counter-techniques wear both crowns and garters. The beginning of the treatise also features a *segno*, or mnemonic diagram with allegorical animals symbolizing the virtues one ought to observe when handling arms, that occurs in the other versions.

The manuscript is covered in pasteboard and consists of 44 parchment folios measuring 18.8 cm in length by 12.5 cm in width, slightly reduced by rebinding. There are two guard-pages. The folios seem to be collected in ten-page gatherings. The first page is in poor condition as a result of water damage, with some text washed away. Examination with a Wood's lamp revealed no recoverable traces. The water damage and the composition and page ordering lead one to conclude that the manuscript forms one integral work and has not been rearranged.

The full history and provenance of the manuscript are unclear. It was evidently re-bound in the seventeenth century, and the guard-page bears a watermark of Dutch arms and initials 'IM', signifying the master paper-maker who worked at the Puy-moyen mill for Sieur Janssen and who was active c. 1635.<sup>7</sup> A sticker on the inner cover depicts a device of two crossed sceptres and a crown over a chain of office with a Teutonic cross under them and a banner 'Cabinet de Livres de Pontchartrain',

indicating that it belonged to Louis Phélypeaux, Marquis de Pontchartrain (1643–1727), who served as royal chancellor from 1699 until 1714 and who was a noted collector of art and books. The book thereafter entered the Bibliothèque du Roi. The recto side of the first folio contains ‘Florius de arte luctandi’ written in a seventeenth-century hand, the number 312 crossed out, ‘ccc’ and a buckle/thorn-type device, Star-of-David design with figure-8’s top, left, and right, the note ‘Sppl’ l. 674’ in a modern hand, and a BN stamp.

The pages of the manuscript are ruled approximately 15.5 cm wide and divided into four unequal boxes: The top between 2.75 and 3 cm tall and containing the text, the one beneath that 7.5 and 8 cm tall and containing the matching illustration, the second text area below that again measuring between 2.75 and 3 cm, and the area for the final illustration measuring between 7.5 and 8 cm tall. While there is some use of colour in the other manuscripts, the Paris example is by far the most extravagant, making lavish use of pigment in all of the illustrations — though the quality of the drawing itself is somewhat less than that of the Getty representation. The text itself is written in a quite beautiful bookhand that we might call a ‘gothico-antiqua’, displaying elements of both medieval bookhands and the elegance and simplicity of emerging humanistic scripts.<sup>8,9</sup> The hand is similar to that of the other manuscripts, but of higher quality. Each illustrated page (save *iv*, which has the *segno* and 44 recto, which has a single technique in the upper register and a verse identifying the author) contains two drawings in pen; coloured with red, blue, and green ink wash; and illuminated with gilt garters and crowns, with the accompanying verse inscribed above. Taking into account the blank pages, the number of illustrations totals 164. By way of comparison, the Getty contains 47 folios and 305 images, the Morgan 19 folios and 124 images, and the Pisani-Dossi 36 folios and 284 images. The missing MS 84 had 58 folios, while MS 110 was small-format and had fifteen in two columns.

The contents are as follows:

*1r*: Blank

*1v*: *Segno*. It is in poor condition due to water damage.

*2r*: Lances on horseback

*3r*, bottom: Sword on horseback begins

*4r*, bottom: Wrestling on horseback begins

*6r*: Defence against cavalry on foot begins

*6v*, bottom: Spear on foot begins

*8r*, bottom: The technique for defending with two sticks against a spear, finishing *8v*, top.

*8v*, bottom: *Pollaxe* masters begin

*10r*, bottom: Sword in one hand begins (including half-sword and wrestling techniques)

*18v*: Sword in one hand ends

*19r*: Blank. This begins a quire.

*19v*: More sword, sword and dagger, sword vs. dagger, some in half-armor.

*21r*: Dagger masters

*21v*: Dagger defence begins

22v: End of the middle quire

26r: More sword in two hands, disarms, and grappling.

31r: More dagger disarms

38v: Wrestling guards, beginning the section on wrestling

43r: Dagger defence

44r: Final dagger defence. The bottom panel bears this legend identifying the author:

Florius hunc librum quondam peritissimus autor  
Edidit \* est igitur sibi plurima laudis honestas  
Contribuenda viro furlana gente perfecto

(The late, most knowledgeable author Fiore wrote this book. It is therefore fitting that great honour should be given to this accomplished man, with praises from the Friulian people.)

44 v: The following device and a BN stamp:

R  
L R  
I

The ordering of the techniques is most interesting when compared to the other manuscripts. The Paris manuscript begins with lances on horseback — the longest-range, most formal form of combat — before progressing to spears on foot, pollaxes, swords, wrestling, and finally, techniques for an unarmed man to use against an attack with a dagger — the least formal form of a fight, and the closest-range. The Morgan, though shorter, similarly begins with equestrian combat.<sup>11</sup> The Getty and Pisani-Dossi, conversely, begin at the closest range, with wrestling, before proceeding to dagger, small stick (the *bastonello*, the marker of judicial or military authority), sword held in both one and two hands, armoured combat, and finally equestrian combat.<sup>10</sup> Both the Pisani-Dossi and Getty versions are also explicitly dedicated to Niccolò III d'Este and presumably laid out as he would have desired. However, the Paris manuscript is most similar to the Pisani-Dossi in its use of verse instructions; the other two manuscripts utilize more detailed, but poetically convoluted, instructions. We can therefore regard none of the existent manuscripts as the original or master-copy.

Though the elaborate flowing sleeves and capes of the surcoats worn by the figures obscures what is worn beneath, the armour and costumes seem to come from no later than the first decades of the fifteenth century. In the vernacular 'alter prologus' of the Pisani-Dossi, Fiore states that the day when he began to write was 10 February 1409 (1410 by the modern calendar), and that he had been training in the martial arts for 50 years,<sup>11</sup> whereas in the Morgan and Getty, he says he had been training for more than 40 years, which would seem to make them slightly older. The internal evidence would seem to place the date of composition of the Paris manuscript similarly in the earlier part of the fifteenth century; certainly the elaborate surcoats and fabric-covered cuirasses rather than 'white armor', the cut of the doublets and

zaddeln on the sleeves, and the use of both chausses and braies and joined hose, all point to an earlier rather than a later date.

Other notable points regarding the military equipment in the Paris manuscript include the Italian custom of wearing a light hauberk underneath a cuirass, or at least mail sleeves pointed or sewn onto an arming doublet. The few helmets in evidence (such as on folio 5r upper register and 21v upper register) seem to be early armets similar to both the other manuscripts and the example S-18 preserved in Schloss Churburg. The combatants do not wear plate shoulder protection, nor do any make use of closed-faced helmets. Also of interest is that, unlike the other Fiore manuscripts, unarmoured combatants are shown fighting and being vanquished by those in armour, including both military/duelling/tournament contexts (such as the combat with pollaxes in 9v, lower register) and civilian/self-defence contexts (such as the counter to a dagger attack in 21v, upper register).

Horse bits seem to be either of a curb or a Pelham type, with one rein attached to a ring and one to a shank. The bridles universally lack nosebands, while the saddles are widely variant, ranging from low-pommel and cantled riding saddles to an almost fully wraparound model (such as the one on 5r, lower register), perhaps intended for jousting: This last is replete with leg protection and would have provided a superbly stable fighting-platform but been nigh-impossible to easily mount or escape from in case of an emergency (5r, upper register). The horses also wear a combination of festive caparisons and barding.

Unlike in the other manuscripts, armour and military equipment in this manuscript seems to be more ideographic than naturalistic, enhancing the luxurious aspect of the work or perhaps serving a metaphor for the effectiveness of Fiore's art. In a sense, though the figures are artistically 'grounded' by the terrain drawn under their feet, and though they show brutally effective martial techniques, they are also placed in an idealized world of chivalry, much as with the fantastic, allegorical passages of arms that would be all the rage at the Burgundian court later in the fifteenth century.

We can conclude from the figures' equipment that the date of composition would seem to be slightly later than the other manuscripts, circa 1415–25. This impression is reinforced by the 'quondam Florius' of the epigraph, which seems to imply that the master was, in fact, deceased at the time his thoughts were 'fixed' in literary Latin — an idea not incompatible with medieval ideas of authorship, as Alain Boureau has pointed out for Thomas Aquinas.<sup>12</sup> This curious fact speaks volumes about late-medieval ideas of writing. The Fiore dei Liberi manuscript tradition, the idea of how a somatic performance such as fighting could be the subject of a permanent record and 'authorship' in the form of a book, and how the whole fits into the court culture and emerging humanist scholarship of fifteenth-century Ferrara, bears further paleographical, codicological, textual, historical, and martial study, while the 'Florius' manuscript itself is well worthy of study as both a cultural artifact and an *objet d'art*. A digitized copy is in my possession, and a full transcription, translation, and scholarly edition of this work alongside the other three Fiore manuscripts is forthcoming from Getty Publications.<sup>13</sup>

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Francesco Novati, *Flos duellatorum: Il Fior di battaglia di maestro Fiore dei Liberi da Premariacco* (Bergamo: Giardini Editori, 1902). The Pisani-Dossi was also published by Giovanni Rapisardi as *Flos Duellatorum in armis, sine armis, equester et pedester* (Padua: Gladiatoria, 1998). Massimo Malipiero has published the Getty manuscript as *Il Fior di battaglia di Fiore dei Liberi da Cividale: Il Codice Ludwig XV 13 del J. Paul Getty Museum*, Udine: Ribis, 2006, and an edition of all three manuscripts was published by Marco Rubboli and Luca Cesari as *Flos Duellatorum: Manuale di Arte del Combattimento del XV secolo* (Rome: Il Cerchio, 2002). Tommaso Leoni has also self-published a translation of the Getty (Lulu.com, 2009). Synthetic treatments by recreationists include Graziano Galvani, Girlanda Roberto, and Lorenzi Enrico's *Flos Duellatorum 1409–2002: La pietra miliare della scuola marziale Italiana* (Libri del Circolo, 2002). See also Luigi Zanutto, *Fiore dei Liberi da Premariacco e i ludi e le festi marziali in Friuli nel Medio-evo* (Udine: del Bianco, 1907).
- <sup>2</sup> Novati, F 1902 *Flos duellatorum: Il Fior di battaglia di maestro Fiore dei Liberi da Premariacco*, Bergamo, Giardini Editori, pp. 28–30.
- <sup>3</sup> Furthermore, in a twist worthy of a potboiler conspiracy theory, the microfilm copy contained a completely different work and it took considerable persuasion of the BN staff to induce them to bring out the actual manuscript. The BN requires that one consult the microfilm before the original, and, since I found the reference in a non-digitized portion of the catalogue, since the very knowledgeable staff had never seen the manuscript before, and since the error of the microform had not been corrected, we can assume that I was the first to handle the Florius manuscript in modern times.
- <sup>4</sup> I am unwilling to make a statement concerning the hands of the four manuscripts until I have had the opportunity to examine them first-hand.
- <sup>5</sup> Novati 1902: 30.
- <sup>6</sup> Howe, R 2008. *Fiore dei Liberi: Origins and Motivations. The Journal of Western Martial Arts*. Available at: [http://ejmas.com/jwma/articles/2008/jwmaart\\_howe\\_0808.htm](http://ejmas.com/jwma/articles/2008/jwmaart_howe_0808.htm). Zanutto, L 1907 *Fiore dei Liberi da Premariacco e i ludi e le festi marziali in Friuli nel Medio-evo*, Udine, del Bianco, pp. 130–33.
- <sup>7</sup> Churchill, W A 1985 *Watermarks in paper in Holland, England, France, etc., in the XVII and XVIII centuries and their interconnection*, Nieuwkoop, B. De Graaf (original 1935), pp. III.
- <sup>8</sup> Thanks to Christopher Celenza for his aid in identifying the hand.
- <sup>9</sup> Derolez, A 2003 *The palaeography of gothic manuscript books, from the twelfth to the early sixteenth century*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp.176.
- <sup>10</sup> The necessity of unarmed self-defence in this milieu is borne up Niccolo D'Este having his rival Ottobuono Terzi assassinated at a 'peace meeting' in 1409 (Dean, *Land and Power*: 25).
- <sup>11</sup> Novati, 1902: 194.
- <sup>12</sup> Boureau, A 2001 'Peut-on parler d'auteurs scholastiques?' In *Auctor et auctoritas: Invention et conformisme dans l'écriture médiévale*, ed. Michel Zimmermann, Paris, École des Chartes.
- <sup>13</sup> Thanks to the efforts of amateur Fiore enthusiasts (notably Bob Charron, Michael Chidester, David Cvet, Matt Easton, Ilkka Hartikainen, Mark Lancaster, Tom Leoni, Rob Lovett, and Greg Mele), there is no shortage of Fiore transcription, translation, and analysis online. The situation is in some respects similar to that of the late nineteenth century, when the publication efforts of the professionals in the fledgling discipline of medieval history to begin to exploit and publish the holdings of European archives were greatly abetted by educated laypeople.

## Notes on contributor

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