

Libro del ejercicio de las armas: A New Pietro Monte Manuscript

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Abstract – The works of Pietro Monte had been forgotten for many centuries, and only recently have their merits been recognised again. This research note presents a newly discovered manuscript, the *Libro del ejercicio de las armas*, a 19th century copy of the Spanish vernacular version of the *Collectanea* known as the “Escorial Manuscript”. The discovery is introduced by a brief survey of the citations of this manuscript and its source in the historiography and by a map displaying the known printed copies of the *Collectanea*. A review of the bibliography and provenance of the manuscript contributes to our understanding of its historical importance.

Keywords – Pietro del Monte, *Collectanea*, *Libro del ejercicio de las armas*, fight book, Spain.

There is currently a growing interest in the work of Pietro Monte. His books, written in Latin, have been almost forgotten for many centuries, and only recently has the merit of his work been recognised again.

One of them, the *Exercitiorum atque artis militaris collectanea*,¹ is a recompilation of diverse materials, including descriptions of armour, physiology and psychology, fighting methods from bare hands to equestrian, armoured and unarmoured combat with any kind of arms, swords, pole arms, throwing arms, etc. It ends with chapters dedicated to the military art.

Although according to Forgeng² it was a very important work at the time of its publication, one of the first printed books on martial arts, it gradually lost importance and fell out of fashion. Maybe the fact of being written in Latin made it less accessible for the common people, and so gradually it was quoted more rarely. However, the Spanish *destreza* authors (and some Italians) persisted in referring to it for another almost 200 years, many times using a Hispanised form of his name, Pedro Monte or Moncio. In the course of the fencing literature renaissance at the turn of the 19th century (Castle, Thimm, Gelli, Vigeant, Leguina), it appears as “Moncio”, obscuring the work’s pedigree, so it was supposed lost. It was not until recent years that the connection with the original author was re-established (Sobotka, Anglo).³

¹ Pietro Monte, *Exercitiorum atque artis militaris collectanea*.

² Forgeng, *Pietro Monte's Collectanea*, p. 1.

³ Cited in Forgeng, *Pietro Monte's Collectanea*, p. 1.

This book survived in print form and it can be found today in several public libraries, many of them in northern Italy, Germany and several European countries; some made their way to the USA.



Figure 1: Map with the location of the known copies of the *Collectanea*

But there are other sources, including a manuscript in Spanish, the *Libro del ejercicio de las armas* (known as the “Escorial Manuscript” by its present location).⁴ There is a controversy whether this work is derived from an possible original Spanish manuscript, or it is a translation from the printed book.⁵ In any case, it is an interesting source that can help us understand or supplement other parts of the book.

We present today a copy of this manuscript, which is located in the National Library of Madrid (*Biblioteca Nacional*).⁶ It is described in the catalogue of manuscripts in the National Library of Spain (*Biblioteca Nacional España*).⁷

2179.

Libro del Ejercicio de las armas. — 1. [Proemio:] Considerando como la memoria de los humanos es devil ... me ha parecido de scribir esta

⁴ Biblioteca del Escorial, a.IV.23.

⁵ Forngeng, *Pietro Monte's Collectanea*, p. 8; Anglo, *Martial Arts*, p. 215.

⁶ *Libro del ejercicio de las armas*, Biblioteca Nacional España, Ms/2179.

⁷ *Inventario general de manuscritos de la Biblioteca Nacional*, t.VI (2100-2374), Madrid: Ministerio Educación Nacional, 1962.

recoleta ... (fol. 1). — 2. Prologo: Avemos dado regla general a todas las armas ... (fol. 4 v.). — 3. [Texto] Capitulo: Queriendo echar alguna cosa ... (fol. 4 v.) ... donde se muestra necesidad (fol. 13). — 4. Prologo: En el libro de cognición de los hombres ... (fol. 13). — 5. [Texto:] Fn la guerra son valientes ... (folio 14) ... para no engrosar ni enfermarnos (fol. 39 v.).

s. XIX. 39 fols. -f 6 hoj. de guardas (3 + 3), 212 X 155.

Enc.: Holandesa, s. xix, 218 X 160. Tejuelo: EJERCICIO DE LAS ARMAS.

Olim: G. 442.

Proc.: De la librería de don Serafín Estébanez Calderón.

Texto probablemente traducido de un original italiano incompleto; numerosas enmiendas, correcciones y tachaduras. El fol. 17 v. en blanco sin que falte texto; foliación arábica moderna a lápiz.

This 19th century copy follows the original quite closely, and so has little to offer to improve the knowledge of the text. Its importance rests on the circumstances of its production.

We can see that the manuscript once belonged to Serafín Estebanez Calderón, and if we follow this track, we find a very diverse group of scholars, writers, bibliophiles and academics, some of them aficionados, many of them political liberals, very active in Madrid in the middle years of the 19th century. We would like to show a series of connections between several of their biographies.

Serafín Estebanez Calderón⁸ (Malaga 1799 – Madrid 1867) was a writer of diverse interests: bullfight critic, historian, Arabist, folklorist, soldier, politician, academic, State counsellor and Senator. He was in close contact with José de Salamanca, a plutocrat and city planner, and Antonio Cánovas del Castillo, several times Prime Minister.

Another member of this group is Antonio Remón Zarco del Valle⁹ (La Habana 1775 – Madrid 1866), this military engineer participated in the Peninsular War and the Carlist uprisings; he was also writer, Senator, ambassador and War Minister. He belonged to several Academies of History, Science, and Arts.

His brother, Manuel Remón Zarco del Valle (Madrid 1823 – Madrid 1922), bibliographer and Librarian of the Royal Palace, contributed to several bibliographic works during his long life. He was also closely related to Leguina and Cruzada Villamil and helped them in bibliographical matters.

⁸ Quintana Bermudez de la Puente, *Diccionario bibliográfico español*, entry “Serafín Estebanez Calderón”.

⁹ Quintana Bermudez de la Puente, *Diccionario bibliográfico español*, entry “Antonio Remón Zarco del Valle”.

Enrique Leguina y Vidal¹⁰ (Madrid 1842 – Madrid 1923), Baronet de la Vega de Hoz, was a lawyer and historian; he occupied high rank civil office positions and was also Senator and Academician. He is most known by his bibliography of Spanish fencing,¹¹ issued in 1904, and by his rich fencing book collection.¹²

Now we come to Gregorio Cruzada Villamil¹³ (Alicante 1832 – Madrid 1884), journalist, writer, historian, and politician; as telegraph general surveyor, he laid the basis for the national telephonic service. As art critic, he wrote books on Velazquez and Rubens, and as National Paint Gallery director discovered several Goya tapestry designs in the Royal Palace cellar. As fencer, he in 1856 founded the Sala de Rada, where he and a group of young enthusiasts tried to recover the almost lost Spanish *destreza*, well in advance of other historical fencing reconstruction attempts in France or England.¹⁴

He wrote about the Escorial Manuscript:¹⁵

This Manuscript deals with fighting on foot, on horseback, with arms or without, ending with a meticulous description of all the horse and knight armour pieces. The style is full of Italianisms, suggesting that the author was a Spaniard living in Italy for a long time. It is very clumsy and there is no order or method to it. This makes it difficult to publish in its actual state, not being understandable for people without fencing and gymnastic knowledge. It appears to be written by a soldier and a good fencer, as some of the techniques described are performed today. This is the oldest manuscript from the Renaissance that I know of, and the first one in the Spanish language.¹⁶

This quote, included in Leguina's bibliography, shows that the Monte work (at least the Escorial copy) was known to historical fencers, and their analysis is pretty accurate with the limited knowledge they had about this work and its author.

The problems we face today about the provenance, i.e. Spanish or Italian origin, original or transcription of the Escorial manuscript, were already glimpsed several years ago by this group of enthusiasts.

I would like to put forward this material to pay tribute to the ones who precede us, and remember and remember that we stand on the shoulders of giants, building on the information already laid out by them, but also to point out that there is a lot more of work to be done.

¹⁰ Quintana Bermudez de la Puente, *Diccionario bibliográfico español*, entry “Enrique de Leguina y Vidal”.

¹¹ Leguina, *Bibliografía e historia de la esgrima española*.

¹² Leguina, *Libros de esgrima españoles y portugueses*.

¹³ Online, <<https://www.museodelprado.es/aprende/enciclopedia/voz/cruzada-villaamil-gregorio/ba283994-7dba-4cfa-a28c-f0dad5855ad9>> (accessed 31/1/19).

¹⁴ Wolf, *Ancient Swordplay*, pp. 24-25.

¹⁵ Leguina, *Bibliografía*, p. 236.

¹⁶ Our translation.

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