



***Que llaman estar nerbado:***  
**the Spanish response to the Italian fencing tradition, 1665–1714**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The dominant approach to managing weapons as practiced by gentlemen in Spain during the seventeenth century was dubbed *la verdadera destreza* (*de las armas*), or the true skill (of arms). It regarded this skill as a liberal rather than a mechanical art.<sup>1</sup> The philosophy of Aristotle, the geometry of Euclid, and the other liberal arts of the period were the basis for this approach. It was distinguished from the fencing which had been commonly practiced in Spain.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the discussion in Luis Méndez de Carmona, *Avisos importantes para el diestro [sobre la destreza de las armas]*, s.l., s.n., s.a. [ca. 1639]. Printed in Madrid, Gabriel Pedraza, 1899, pp. 9–12.

<sup>2</sup> The *destreza primitiva* of the author Vélez de Guevara, *El Diablo Cojuelo*, Madrid, Imprenta del Reino, 1641, p. 62r is referred to by authors of *la verdadera destreza* texts as *destreza común*, *destreza vulgar*, *esgrima común*, and *esgrima vulgar*. Carranza refers to it also as *la disciplina vulgar*, (Sanlúcar de Barrameda 1582., p. 133v), as well as *la falsa destreza*; the running title of his second dialogue is *Dialogo segundo de la falsa destreza*, pp. 69v–133r, opposing it to the *Dialogo primero que trata de la verdadera destreza ...* pp. 9r–64r, Rada defines *destreza falsa* as “that which lacks the necessary foundations for achieving the end to which it is directed”, Cádiz, Cristóbal de Requena, 1705, p. II 54. The order of noun and adjective is not fixed in these phrases. For example, in Pérez de Mendoza y Quijada one sees *la vulgar esgrima*, Pérez de Mendoza y Quijada, Miguel, *Resumen de la verdadera destreza de las armas en treinta y ocho aserciones: Resumidas, y advertidas con demostraciones Prácticas, deducido de las obras principales que tiene escritas su Autor*, Madrid, Francisco Sanz, 1675 p. 2v), *la vulgar destreza* (Mendoza, *Resumen de la verdadera destreza*, 1675, pp. 24v–25r), and *la destreza verdadera* (Mendoza, *Resumen de la verdadera destreza*, 1675, p. 25r). *Destreza*, literally “skill”, was used instead of *esgrima*, or fencing, when referring to *la verdadera destreza/destreza verdadera*. Rada writes: “Of this the first book is composed in order to instruct the true diestro in the science of the instrument, sword”, the application of which results in admirable effects, “as are seen in what in common language is called *destreza* ...” (Francisco Lorenz de Rada, *Nobleza de la espada, cuyo esplendor se expresa en tres libros, según ciencia, arte y experiencia*, Madrid, Imprenta Real, Joseph Rodríguez Escobar, 1705, p. II 1), “the art of the management (regimen) of the sword, which in common language is called *destreza*” (Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, p. II 6), and “the art of managing (*regir*) the sword, which is commonly called *destreza*” (Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, p. II 28). Qualifying *destreza* as *verdadera* is a means of distinguishing a particular approach to managing the sword from the common approach. One might note in this connection that we have yet to see the pairing of *esgrima* and *verdadera*. While a practitioner of *la verdadera destreza* might be referred to as *diestro*, as might a non-practitioner, e.g., *diestros vulgares* (Jerónimo Sánchez de Carranza, *Libro de Jerónimo de Carança. Natural de Sevilla. Que trata de la filosofía de las armas. Y de su destreza y de la agresión y defensión cristiana. [Acabose ese libro de la Especulación de la destreza. Año de 1569 (col.)]*, Sanlúcar de Barrameda, Printed in the house of the author at the order of the duke of

Don Luis Pacheco de Narváez<sup>3</sup>, the first great systematizer of *la verdadera destreza*, was, in his later years, the *maestro mayor en la filosofía y destreza de las armas*<sup>4</sup> of Spain, as well as weapons instructor to Philip IV. He had analyzed Italian fencing in some detail in his last major work, the *New Science*, which was composed in 1635 and published posthumously in 1672. Therefore, at the beginning of our period, marked by the accession of Philip IV's son, Carlos II, in 1665, the analysis of the Italian fencing tradition contained in the *New Science* was already a generation out of date. By the end of our period, the end of the War of the Spanish Succession, it was more than two generations out of date, and Italian fencing had not stood still.

During the second half of the seventeenth century a new school of fencing appeared in southern Italy, which Spain had long dominated. The new school originated in Naples; by 1670 it had spread to Sicily.<sup>5</sup> The Neapolitan school, which, while not ignoring the sword alone, favored the use of sword and dagger, steadily gained ground as the seventeenth century drew to a close; it is one which Spaniards were increasingly likely to face in the areas of Italy which they governed.<sup>6</sup>

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Medina Sidonia, 1582, p. 103v), one has yet to see him referred to as an *esgrimidor* (fencer). Carranza, for example, speaks of the arrogance of the *esgrimidores* (Carranza, *Libro de Jerónimo de Carança*, 1582, p. 68v). He makes a distinction between *diestro* and *esgrimidor* (Carranza, *Libro de Jerónimo de Carança*, 1582, p. 112r), and refers to 'the skill of arms, which the common people call fencing (*esgrima*) (a name unfit for ears accustomed to honor)'. (135v) The seventeenth-century work, *Avisos importantes para el diestro [sobre la destreza de las armas]* was published in the late nineteenth century under the title *Avisos importantes para el diestro en la esgrima por Luis Méndez de Carmona*; however, while the application of *esgrima* to such a work might have been natural in the nineteenth-century, it is debatable whether or to what extent this would necessarily have been so in the seventeenth century. For example, Santos de la Paz argued that there was no distinction between *esgrima* and *destreza* (Francisco Santos de la Paz, *Ilustración de la destreza indiana*, Lima, Jerónimo de Contreras y Alvarado, 1712, pp. 11–12). This was written as part of a debate, after Rada had written a response to Diego Rodríguez de Guzman, whom Santos de la Paz is defending, entitled *Defensa de la Verdadera Destreza de las Armas, y Respuesta a la Carta Apologetica de Diego Rodríguez de Guzman, graduado de Maestro de Esgrima en la Universidad del Engaño*, or Defence of the True Skill of Arms, and Response to the Letter of Defence of Diego Rodríguez de Guzman, Fencing Master graduate of the University of Deceit. If the analysis here is correct, then Rada is using the term *Maestro de Esgrima* as a term of *opprobrium*.

<sup>3</sup> Luis Pacheco de Narváez, *Advertencias para la enseñanza de la filosofía, y destreza de las armas, así à pie, como à caballo*, Pamplona, s.n., 1642.

<sup>4</sup> Chief instructor in the philosophy and skill of arms.

<sup>5</sup> Giuseppe Villardita's *La scherma Siciliana* (Giuseppe Villardita, *La scherma Siciliana*, Palermo, per il Bua, e Camagna, 1670) and *Trattato della scherma Siciliana* (Giuseppe Villardita, *Trattato della scherma Siciliana*, Palermo, per Carlo Adamo, 1673), despite their titles, describe the same school as the *Della scherma napoletana* (1669) of Francesco Antonio Mattei, whom Villardita names as a fellow student (Villardita, *La scherma Siciliana*, 1670, p. 21).

<sup>6</sup> For an overview of some of the characteristics of this school, see Charles Blair, 'The Neapolitan School of Fencing: Its Origins and Early Characteristics', *Acta Periodica Duellatorum*, 2

Francesco Antonio Marcelli, the son of the founder of the Neapolitan school of fencing, wrote that Italian fencing had changed significantly from earlier times to his day, so that only some invariable maxims and general axioms applied, while the specific mode of play was very different<sup>7</sup>. Thus, in order to address challenges from abroad, practitioners of *la verdadera destreza* in this period needed to rethink the words of Pacheco.<sup>8</sup>

The Spanish<sup>9</sup> response to these developments will be considered in chronological order. It will be argued that *la verdadera destreza* was not so much a system of fencing as a systematic approach to self-defence, in the manner of a science, designed to address challenges sword in hand, in the manner of an art.<sup>10</sup>

## II. THE SPANISH RESPONSE

### II.1. Pérez de Mendoza y Quijada, Miguel (1672; 1675)

The first author in our period to treat of Italian fencing was Miguel Pérez de Mendoza y Quijada. He began his career as weapons instructor to Balthasar Carlos, Philip IV's heir apparent, a position he obtained after a public display of skill.<sup>11</sup> When Balthasar Carlos

(2014), 9–26). For more detailed presentations, see: Luca Cecchinato, 'Elementi di innovazione nella scuola napoletana in età barocca: analisi comparativa dei principali autori', in *La Bottega dello Storico* (San Marino: Il Cerchio, 2011), pp. 47–61; 2013, pp. 57–81).

<sup>7</sup> Marcelli, Francesco Antonio, *Regole della scherma insegnate da Lelio, e Titta Marcelli scritte da Francesco Antonio Marcelli figlio, e nipote e maestro di scherma in Roma. Opera non meno utile, che necessaria à chiunque desidera far profitto in questa Professione*, Rome, Dom. Ant. Ercole, 1686, Pt. 1, Bk. 1, Ch. I, p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> It is customary today to refer to Pacheco de Narváez as Pacheco, though in period he was usually referred to as Narváez when he was not referred to as Don Luis. However, Santos de la Paz does refer to him as Pacheco (Francisco Santos de la Paz, *Ilustración de la destreza indiana*, Lima, Jerónimo de Contreras y Alvarado, 1712, pp. 108–110). We follow that practice here.

<sup>9</sup> For convenience, "Spanish" will be used as shorthand for pertaining to *la verdadera destreza*, though Spanish (and more generally Iberian) fencing was broader than *la verdadera destreza*, as indicated earlier. This is being done because *la verdadera destreza* does not lend itself to forming adjectives. This usage conforms to that of the Spanish writers of the period when the context was clear.

<sup>10</sup> The distinction between art and science occurs more than once in *destreza* texts. For the application of the distinction as it is being made here, see, for example, at Carmona, Méndez da Carmona, *Avisos importantes para el diestro [sobre la destreza de las armas]*, p. 12. (After they have first been cited in full, Spanish surnames will be shortened according to the practice of period authors if at all possible.)

<sup>11</sup> Pérez de Mendoza y Quijada, *Principios de los cinco sujetos principales, de que se compone la filosofía, y matemática de las armas, práctica, y especulativa* – edición crítica (Santiago de Compostela: AGEA, 2011), pp. 7–8.

died prematurely, Mendoza became weapons instructor to Philip IV's natural son, Don Juan of Austria, who would effectively rule Spain from 1677 to 1679, the year in which both he and Mendoza died.

Mendoza describes a posture with the sword arm withdrawn and held close to the body, which is used by “foreign nations, both Italians and French, and others, who deliver a very violent, strong thrust with much force and brevity to the chest. They do this quickly because of extensive use and practice in executing this strike.”<sup>12,13</sup> His defence is to avoid the opponent's right side,<sup>14</sup> where his sword has the greatest potency and force, because of its great reach, but rather to move towards the opponent's left side,<sup>15</sup> profiling the body while the opponent's is, relatively speaking, squared to one's own, “with which one begins to act with security, by keeping the bodies counterposed, one profiled and the other squared, with which the one who goes profiled proceeds more securely [...]”<sup>16</sup>. This expresses a fundamental principle and mode of operation of *la verdadera destreza*, which is to break symmetry with one's opponent,<sup>17</sup> “on the assumption that from equal causes the effects are equal.”<sup>18</sup> The principle is embodied in this case by ensuring that one's torso is not oriented in the same vertical plane as one's opponent's: if one is profiled, the other is squared, and vice-versa.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Pérez de Mendoza y Quijada, Miguel. *Principios de los cinco sujetos principales, de que se compone la filosofía, y matemática de las armas, práctica, y especulativa*, Pamplona, Imprenta de Martin Gregorio de Zabala, 1672, pp. 69 and 127.

<sup>13</sup> Rada will describe this posture and method of attack in similar terms (Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, p. II 313).

<sup>14</sup> ... no buscarle por la parte de su espada, que es su brazo derecho ... (Mendoza, *Principios de los cinco sujetos principales*, 1672, pp. 73 and 130).

<sup>15</sup> ... se ha de buscar al contrario por el perfil de su cuerpo, que es el brazo izquierdo ... (Mendoza, *Principios de los cinco sujetos principales*, 1672, pp. 74 and 130).

<sup>16</sup> Pérez de Mendoza y Quijada, Miguel., *Principios de los cinco sujetos principales*, (Mendoza, *Principios de los cinco sujetos principales*, 1672, pp. 74 and 130)

<sup>17</sup> Expressed as *desigualdad*, inequality: “[...] all of *destreza*, in its practical part, consists in the *diestro's* needing to maintain inequality with his opponent, remaining defended while he offends [...]” (Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, p. II 221).

<sup>18</sup> Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, p. III 43.

<sup>19</sup> This principle is stated more than once in *la verdadera destreza* texts. In De Viedma, *Método de enseñanza de maestros*, 1639, p. 14r, one is profiled when moving to one's right, and squared when moving to one's left. If one assumes two right-handed opponents, in moving to the right one's opponent will appear to be squaring, while in moving to the left one's opponent will appear to be profiling. For Guerra de la Vega, one should never be profiled when attacking to the opponent's right side, and one should always be profiled when attacking to the left side (Álvaro Guerra de la Vega, *Comprehension de la destreza por el Capitán Don Álvaro Guerra de la Vega, Caballero del Orden de Santiago ...*, Santander, [s.n.], 1681. Citations are to *Comprensión de la destreza por D. Álvaro Guerra de la Vega; publicala por vez primera el Excmo. Señor Don Manuel Pérez de Guzmán y Boza, Marqués de Jerez de*

The *diestro* [...] has to hold his sword so that it points downwards, towards the left side of the opponent's waist, with some sort of restlessness or continuous motion, taking care that the pommel of one's hilt is pointed at the middle of one's chest, so that if the opponent should discharge his strike with strength, he will find the way hindered by the hilt of the diestro's sword, because when he recognizes which path the execution will take, its remedy will be easy for the diestro, since for his defence he can take advantage of any of the four movements which the wrist makes, up, down, to one side or the other,<sup>20</sup> so as to divert the opponent's sword from his body, and so that his own remains, not only defending (*en su defensa*) but also striking (wounding), since the basis for being able to do it was provided it, and because election of the proportionate mean has been made.<sup>21,22</sup>

Mendoza<sup>23</sup> illustrates one guard, the *mezza luna*, calling it the *postura italiana*. We can infer several things from the illustration: it occurs in a plate of illustrations where the Italian is the only one of the nationalities shown who is holding an off-hand weapon, which suggests that it was regarded as typical, which it was in the south of Italy; a typical Italian sword and dagger guard is known and identified as such by a Spaniard towards the beginning of our period.<sup>24</sup>

Mendoza says that to ignore this method of striking and its defence is an error on the part of Spaniards, since it is certain and true, and proceeds by one of the ways in which

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*los Caballeros con una advertencia del Excmo. Sr. D. Enrique Leguina, Barón de la Vega de Hoz*, Seville: [s.n.], Imp. de E. Rasco, 1895, p. 29). See also the extended discussion in Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, pp. II 227–234, and the observation by Carmona that the knowledge of the profiles of the body is among the most important foundations of *la verdadera destreza* (Luis Méndez de Carmona, 1899. *Avisos importantes para el diestro [sobre la destreza de las armas]* ([S.l.]: [s.n.], s.a. [ca. 1639]. MS.) Citations are to *Avisos importantes para el diestro en la esgrima por Luis Méndez de Carmona. Publicados ahora por la primera vez por Pedro Vindel* (Madrid: [s.n.], 1899, p. 27).

<sup>20</sup> Cristóbal de Cala (Cristóbal de Cala, *Desengaño de la espada, y norte de diestros*, Cádiz, Fernando Rey, 1642) bases his defensive strategy on this method.

<sup>21</sup> In *la verdadera destreza* the *medio proporcionado* is the place from which an attack may be executed. In this case, the opponent is providing the requisite *medio*, bringing it to the *diestro* by means of his own actions, rather than the *diestro's* having to make an effort to seek it. This conforms to Rada's analysis of the Italian thrust and its Spanish defence, 'if one knows how to make use of the tempo, and proportionate mean, which the opponent is choosing' (Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, p. III 617).

<sup>22</sup> Mendoza, *Principios de los cinco sujetos principales*, 1672, pp. 74–75 and 130–131.

<sup>23</sup> Mendoza, *Resumen de la verdadera destreza*, 1675.

<sup>24</sup> For a description of this guard, see Blair, 'The Neapolitan School...', pp. 12, 17).

it is possible for the *diestro* to position himself<sup>25</sup>. In this concern he anticipates later authors, to whom we now turn.

## II.2. Texedo Sicilia de Teruel, Pedro (1678)<sup>26</sup>

Texedo intended to teach *la verdadera destreza* to beginners in Italy.<sup>27</sup> The only Italians named are Neapolitans and Sicilians. Texedo says that both fight in the same way<sup>28</sup> despite any differences of detail that might be perceived<sup>29</sup>.

He describes a variety of opinions and methods in use against doubled weapons. In one

if the enemy is standing squared, which they call *a la Italiana*, in whichever of his guards,<sup>30</sup> so that the sword is positioned below that of the opponent, and when the opponent thrusts above his sword, they go with their own very much united with the opposing one, striking to the outside. Others who use the Italian [posture], knowing the risk, do not want to travel over the top. Instead, they feint<sup>31</sup> as if to strike, then withdraw the sword a little, and given the movement (or, disorder) which the opponent's arm and sword have made, thinking that he was thrusting to strike, in that tempo those of the Italian [posture] apply the dagger to the opposing sword and strike, quickly retiring into guard with the sword arm withdrawn.<sup>32,33</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Mendoza, *Principios de los cinco sujetos principales*, 1672, pp. 70, 73, 127 nd 129.

<sup>26</sup> Texedo Sicilia de Teruel, Pedro, *Escuela de principiantes, y promptuario de cuestiones en la filosofía de la verdadera Destreza de las Armas, en que van resumidas con demostraciones practicas y especulativas la mayor parte de las principales d[e] esta nobilissima ciencia*, Naples, Juan Francisco Paz, 1678.

<sup>27</sup> His work, which was published in Naples, is bilingual, with Spanish and Italian in facing columns.

<sup>28</sup> Texedo, *Escuela de principiantes*, 1678, p. 73.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>30</sup> This clearly indicates that standing squared before one's opponent was regarded as quintessentially Italian. It is characteristic, for example, of all the Neapolitan sword and dagger guards.

<sup>31</sup> The Spanish has *acometimiento*, which elsewhere is translated into Italian by the more general *assalto* or *investire* (1678, pp. 74 and 83); however, in this place it is translated as *finta*.

<sup>32</sup> '*volviendo con brevedad a retirarse a su guardia de la postura estraña*'. Something very similar to the technique described here appears in d'Alessandro, though in less detail (Giuseppe D'Alessandro, *Opera di d. Giuseppe D'Alessandro duca di Peschiolanciano divisa in cinque libri*, Naples, Antonio Muzio, 1723 (The first edition was published in 1711. Citations are to the expanded 1723 edition), p. 22).

<sup>33</sup> Texedo, *Escuela de principiantes*, 1678, p. 67.

This action would appear to fall into the class of feints described by Mattei<sup>34</sup>, the first published author of the Neapolitan school.

Texedo illustrates the form of the lunge with sword and dagger common to both Naples and Sicily<sup>35,36</sup>. Both knees are straight; sword arm and dagger arm are fully extended and parallel to the ground; the sword arm is pointed straight forward and the dagger arm is pointed straight back; the torso is fully profiled and completely vertical.<sup>37</sup>

The overwhelming impression one receives when reading texts of the Neapolitan school is that the sword and dagger was favored over the sword alone. Mattei<sup>38</sup> begins with sword and dagger, as does Villardita. D'Alessandro, a Neapolitan duke, regards sword and dagger as foundational<sup>39</sup>, and indicates that children could be seen playing with sticks in lieu of swords and daggers<sup>40</sup>. That Texedo, writing in Naples, should portray Italians as fighting with both weapons is therefore not surprising, since his Italians are southern Italians; his defence against the Italian posture, noting, like Mendoza, the speed with which they work from it<sup>41</sup>, will also involve a sword and dagger.

For Texedo, there is one way to work with both sword alone and sword and dagger, the sole difference being the need to position the dagger in the latter<sup>42</sup>.

The dagger hand is held halfway down the body<sup>43</sup> between the center of the chest and the right side of the body<sup>44</sup> so that together with the sword arm and the body the dagger makes an equilateral triangle. The point of the dagger is raised so that the weak is moved close to the sword arm, about the width of four fingers from the hilt, the point directed at the superior quillon, “making an imaginary straight line from the point of the

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<sup>34</sup> Francesco Antonio Mattei, *Della scherma napoletana. Discorso Primo. Dove sotto il titolo dell'Impossibile Possibile si prova che la scherma sia Scienza, e non Arte. Si danno le vere Norme di spada, e Pugnale*, Foggia, Novella de Bonis, 1669, pp. 31–38.

<sup>35</sup> The Neapolitan school employed it, as did Morsicato Pallavicini, a Sicilian master who, unlike his Sicilian contemporary Villardita, was not a member of the Neapolitan school.

<sup>36</sup> Texedo, *Escuela de principiantes*, 1678, p. 72.

<sup>37</sup> This lunge is described in detail in several Neapolitan texts, for which see Blair ‘The Neapolitan School...’, pp. 15–16).

<sup>38</sup> Mattei, *Della scherma napoletana*, 1699.

<sup>39</sup> Giuseppe D'Alessandro, *Opera di d. Giuseppe D'Alessandro duca di Peschiolanciano divisa in cinque libri*, Naples, Antonio Muzio, expanded edition, 1723, p. 477.

<sup>40</sup> D'Alessandro, *Opera di d. Giuseppe D'Alessandro*, 1723, p. 283.

<sup>41</sup> Texedo, *Escuela de principiantes*, 1678, p. 68.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>43</sup> ‘in the horizontal line’. The *linea horizontal* divides the body in half (Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, p. II 73).

<sup>44</sup> “[...] between the diametral [an imaginary vertical line running through the center of the chest] and right collateral, which descend from the chest”.

dagger to that of the sword, containing the quillon within said line [...] without having lost the profile of [the] body at all”<sup>45,46</sup>. This serves against any kind of *destreza* and strike that might be used, taking care that most of the time the sword is used to forestall a strike, the dagger then immediately holding it while the sword is used offensively.

This method serves also to defend against the Italian posture, in which the sword arm is withdrawn<sup>47,48</sup>. Texedo notes that one should lower one’s own sword arm to match what the opponent is doing with his. The sword is pointed at the opponent’s left eye, leaving him only one path by which to strike<sup>49</sup>. The body is slightly weighted over the left leg, so that the right leg is more ready to move in the direction required<sup>50</sup>.

After assuming the requisite position, the *diestro* will select the mean of proportion, judging it by eye,<sup>51</sup> positioning the sword so that, were it pointing straight at the opponent, the point would be in line with the superior quillon of the opponent’s sword, if it, too, were pointing straight forward. He will then immediately make a very short transverse step to the left, leading with the right foot, about half a foot<sup>52</sup> from the common diameter,<sup>53</sup> “with which I will have selected the correct proportionate mean without failing to do what is necessary nor going to excess”<sup>54,55</sup>. If one loses the triangle

<sup>45</sup> This conforms to the principles given by Mendoza when using doubled weapons (Mendoza, *Resumen de la verdadera destreza*, 1675, pp. 46r–47r; 48r). Texedo’s instructions for how to hold the sword and dagger are very much like Rada’s *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, p. III 431–432; fig. 45.

<sup>46</sup> Texedo, *Escuela de principiantes*, 1678, p. 76.

<sup>47</sup> The two Italian sword and dagger guards Texedo depicts are *la guardia à fianconata* and *la guardia à mezza luna*, or half moon. These are the two most commonly illustrated Italian guards in Spanish texts.

<sup>48</sup> Texedo, *Escuela de principiantes*, 1678, p. 77.

<sup>49</sup> Texedo, *Escuela de principiantes*, 1678, pp. 77–78.

<sup>50</sup> Texedo, *Escuela de principiantes*, 1678, pp. 78–79.

<sup>51</sup> The *medio de proporción* is the distance from the opponent such that the point of the opponent’s weapon does not pass the hilt of one’s own, assuming that both weapons are held extended, pointing straight at the opposing swordsman. In this case the Italian’s is not, so the practitioner of *la verdadera destreza* estimates what the position of the opponent’s hilt would be were the sword arm and weapon to be held fully extended, parallel to the ground.

<sup>52</sup> See the appendix for a brief treatment of traditional Spanish measures.

<sup>53</sup> The common diameter is the imaginary line on the ground between one and one’s opponent.

<sup>54</sup> [...] *sin faltar a lo necesario, ni sobrar en el superfluo*. This is a periodic refrain in *la verdadera destreza* texts, variously stated, for example: [...] *se deve buscar lo preciso, y huir de lo superfluo* ... (Arrieta Arandía y Morentín, Juan Antonio de, *Resumen de la verdadera destreza, y modo fácil para saber los caminos verdaderos en la Batalla, reducidos à cristianos, y reales movimientos*, Pamplona, Martin Gregorio de Zabàla, 1688, p. 23) Aristotle had described the mean (Greek μέσον, Latin medium, Spanish medio) relative to individuals, as opposed to the arithmetic mean, as μήτε πλεονάζει μήτε ἐλλείπει’ (‘neither going too far nor falling short’). (Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, II. 5. 1106a 31–



during the course of the encounter (i.e., if the weapons should become disunited), one should promptly form it again (i.e., re-unite the weapons).<sup>56</sup>

Texedo makes some general statements of interest and importance. He says that the swordsman has an obligation to learn the methods of operation of each nation, that he has had practical experience with some masters of arms and swordsmen of different nations, and that he has “known the effect that each one can do by their causes and ways in which they operate, each nation trying to hold his way of proceeding in *destreza* in greater esteem, guided more by passion, by the love of homeland, than by reason.”<sup>57</sup>

However, “[...] the true *diestro* must not be established in the love of homeland so as to proceed in conformity with it ... because the true skill is and must be all one, and should be equal for all nations.”<sup>58</sup>

If the true skill is science, then this must be correct. Manuel Antonio de Brea, the *maestro mayor* of Spain in 1805, expresses this very clearly<sup>59</sup>:

[...] the true skill (*la verdadera destreza*) is a science consisting of universal principles [...] [it] does not have a homeland, nor is it limited to this or that country [...]<sup>60</sup>

### II.3. Guerra de la Vega, Alvaro (1681)<sup>61</sup>

Álvaro Guerra de la Vega introduces the Italian posture as follows.

The posture that with sword and dagger they say is not subject to *atajo*<sup>62</sup> is the one which we commonly call Italian, which, well made with all

32; cf. the discussion in II. 5. 1106b 33 – II. 6. 1107a 6 on virtue as a mean, relative to the individual, between the two vices of excess and deficiency).

<sup>55</sup> Texedo, *Escuela de principiantes*, 1678, p. 83.

<sup>56</sup> Texedo extends his method of wielding the dagger accompanied by the sword to the buckler and the shield, which differ from the dagger simply in that they are defensive and not offensive weapons. (Texedo, *Escuela de principiantes*, 1678, pp. 86–88).

<sup>57</sup> Texedo, *Escuela de principiantes*, 1678, p. 73.

<sup>58</sup> Texedo, *Escuela de principiantes*, 1678, pp. 74–75.

<sup>59</sup> Manuel Antonio de Brea, *Principios universales y reglas generales de la verdadera destreza del espadín, según la doctrina mixta de francesa, italiana y española, dispuestos para instrucción de los caballeros seminaristas del Real Seminario de Nobles de esta corte. Por su Maestro D. Manuel Antonio de Brea, Maestro Mayor y Examinador de todos los del Reino*, Madrid, Imprenta Real, 1805.

<sup>60</sup> Brea, *Principios universales y reglas generales*, 1805, pp. ii, Introduction.

<sup>61</sup> Guerra de la Vega, *Comprehension de la destreza*, 1895 (cit.).

<sup>62</sup> *Atajo* is a technical term in *la verdadera destreza* for an action that impedes or intercepts the forward motion of the opponent’s sword. *Atajo*, which may be glossed as “impediment” (Gomez

the parts and circumstances of posture of dagger and body, knowledge of the distance, or the proportionate mean for it, is the best of the *tretas*,<sup>63</sup> or to say it better, the pith of the practical *destreza*,<sup>64</sup> even though its execution and perfect knowledge is difficult[...]. It consists of an interval of three feet from the left foot to the right along the line of the diameter.<sup>65</sup> The right foot is either for entering with the thrust or for entering in stance, without bending the knee, *que llaman estar nerbado*,<sup>66</sup> almost without setting [it] on the ground, completely ready to discharge his strike when in range [...]<sup>67</sup>.

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Arias de Porres, *Resvmen De La Verdadera Destreza En El Maneio De La Espada*, Melchor Estevez, 1667, p. 62; Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, p. III 554), means “interception” or “short-cut”.

<sup>63</sup> *Treta* is a technical term in *la verdadera destreza*. Rada states that ‘it is the same as scheme or stratagem, and so the *treta* is not a strike (as many authors want) but the cause from which that effect or act is produced, and by its definition, it is a concept of the understanding of the *diestro* ...’ (Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, p. II 99; cf. Porres, *Resvmen De La Verdadera Destreza*, 1667, p. 51; Juan Antonio de Arrieta Arandia y Morentín, *Resumen de la verdadera destreza*, Pamplona: Martin Gregorio de Zabàla, 1688, p. 23. See also Luis Díaz de Viedma, *Método de enseñanza de maestros en la ciencia filosófica de la verdadera destreza matemática de la[s] armas*, Barcelona, Sebastián y Iame Matevad, 1639, p. 4r.). This is in accordance with Pacheco’s definition (Luis Pacheco de Narváez, *Nueva ciencia, y filosofía de la destreza de las armas, su teórica, y práctica*, Madrid, Melchior Sánchez, 1672; (a costa de Manuel de Sossa)), cited as the *New Science*, p. 156). In the context of *la verdadera destreza*, it might be thought of as design, in the sense of ‘a plan or scheme conceived in the mind and intended for subsequent execution’, the first sense given in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, from which follows the second sense, ‘a plan to attack someone or something’, as in a design upon an opponent, which leads to the sense of ‘a stratagem or scheme involving cunning or hypocrisy’: *treta* may also mean trick or ruse; cf. Mendoza, who equates *tretas* with *engaños* (deceptions). (Mendoza, *Resumen de la verdadera destreza*, 1675, pp. 25r; 26r; 64r) However, *treta* may also be used to refer to specific techniques. We leave it untranslated as a technical term.

<sup>64</sup> *La verdadera destreza* has two components, the theoretical and the practical. Here Guerra de la Vega (Guerra de la Vega, *Comprehension de la destreza*, 1895) is in agreement with Mendoza, who regarded this method of striking as certain and true, as we have seen.

<sup>65</sup> The common diameter, defined above.

<sup>66</sup> “[...] which they call being *annervato*”. In addition to the standard Italian form *annervare*, one also finds *nervare* in Villardita, *La scherma Siciliana*, 1670, p. 14. Pallavicini will use the word *annervare* to describe both the left knee and the body in the lunge which we have described above (Giuseppe Morsicato Pallavicini, *La scherma illustrata, Volume 2*, Anselmo, 1673, p. 11), while D’Alessandro will write ‘*teso il destro ginocchio*’ (D’Alessandro, *Opera di d. Giuseppe D’Alessandro*, 1723, p. 483) and ‘*col ginocchio destro teso*’ (‘with the right knee tensed [or taught]’) (D’Alessandro, *Opera di d. Giuseppe D’Alessandro*, 1723, p. 757); Terracusa glosses *teso* as *annervato*: ‘*col ginocchio dritto teso, seu annervato*’ (D’Alessandro, *Opera di d. Giuseppe D’Alessandro*, 1723, p. 68; cf. 65). In a contemporary text on horsemanship we read, ‘*Il corpo suo il cavaliere l’ha da tener fermo e unito o annervato, cioè duro* (hard) ...’ (Nicola e Luigi Santapaulina, *L’arte del cavallo*. Padua, Nella stamperia del Seminario,

The guard he illustrates is the guard between the weapons, *la guardia à fianconata*, the most commonly illustrated Italian sword and dagger guard in the Spanish texts.

A key to Guerra de la Vega's defence is the introduction of a new *medio*, the *medio proporcional*, or proportional mean, in addition to the mean of proportion and the proportionate mean, mentioned above. The proportional mean designates one of two positions, one on either side of the common diameter, between the mean of proportion and any of the proportionate means.<sup>68</sup>

For Guerra de la Vega it is a settled principle that “there is no posture that is not subject to *atajo* [...]”<sup>69</sup>, since one can position one's sword so as to prevent one's opponent from striking by the shortest path<sup>70</sup>. He will use a kind of *atajo* against this posture.<sup>71</sup>

The proportional mean [...] is that which defends us [...] and since one cannot physically<sup>72</sup> subject the sword to *atajo*, it will be imaginary, or to say it better, almost physically [...] <sup>73,74</sup>

1696, p. II 157). The sense in these contexts is of being tensed, taut, tightened, stiffened, firm, hard, rigid, not relaxed or slack.

<sup>67</sup> Guerra de la Vega, *Comprehension de la destreza*, 1895 (cit.), pp. 33–34.

<sup>68</sup> The only other author to use the proportional mean will be Francisco Lorenz de Rada, Guerra de la Vega's junior by half a generation. Both were natives of Cantabria, in the north of Spain, born in towns about 80 kilometers (almost 50 miles) apart; the capital of the province, Santander, is halfway between the two. It is possible, though by no means yet proved, that the proportional mean might represent a regional development of *la verdadera destreza*. I am indebted to Jesus J. Merchan Sanchez-Jara for suggesting the regional connection between the two authors in a personal communication.

<sup>69</sup> Guerra de la Vega, *Comprehension de la destreza*, 1895 (cit.), p. 35.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> There is a particular way of placing an *atajo* in *la verdadera destreza*, but the term can also be used more generally. For example, Antonio Yuste Iuer, Instructor of the Mathematical Philosophy of Weapons in the court of Spain, stated that ‘any detention of a strike was *atajo*’, which is the summary by Tamariz (Nicolás Tamariz: *Cartilla, y luz en la verdadera destreza, sacada de los escritos de D. Luis Pacheco y Narváez, y de los Autores que refiere*, Seville, Herederos de Thomàs López de Haro, 1696, p. 34) of a more detailed passage included in Ettenhard, *Compendio de los fundamentos*, 1675 p. 352; cf. Carmona, 1899, pp. 43–44).

<sup>72</sup> *realmente*, literally, “truly”, “actually”.

<sup>73</sup> Mendoza identifies an *atajo virtual*, or virtual *atajo* ((Mendoza, *Principios de los cinco sujetos principales*, 1672, pp. 36/103 – 38/105), a term also used by Rada (*atajos virtuales*) (Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, p. III 556), who defines it as follows ‘The *atajo* is formed with subjection, and is formed virtually, without aggregation ... in the virtual can be found some superior perfections, and of more power, than in the actual’ (Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, p. II 102). Texedo describes making an *atajo* virtually (Texedo, *Escuela de principiantes*, 1678, pp. 55–56).

<sup>74</sup> Guerra de la Vega, *Comprehension de la destreza*, 1895 (cit.), p. 36.

The proportional mean and the kind of *atajo* that anticipates and intercepts the path of the opponent's weapon, impeding it, are the keys to Guerra de la Vega's defence.

The swordsman places himself in the proportional mean. The sword is lowered to the extent possible, the hilt raised to the level of the right eye, defending the outside line, offering only the inside line,<sup>75</sup> the dagger completely upraised, the quillons not tilting in any direction, treating it as if it were a buckler, its pommel over that of the sword.

Guerra de la Vega notes that the point of the Italian's sword is held more than three and a half feet from the body of his opponent, so although he only needs to make a forward motion, and regardless of how quick that motion is, it has a way to travel, even if only three and a half feet. However, for the Spaniard's sword to intercept this movement requires only four fingers of lateral motion, "and in this proportion the arm and the sword impede (*ataja*) the strike and catch it on the way"<sup>76</sup>. This accords with his earlier statement that "although it can wound by the shortest path, it is an evident principle that equal things can be done in equal times; therefore, being equally quick, when beginning at the same time, the one who has less to go will arrive more quickly"<sup>77</sup>.

#### II.4. Arrieta Arandia y Morentín, Juan Antonio de (1688)<sup>78</sup>

In the section where he describes the Italian posture, Arrieta, deputy *maestro mayor* for Navarre, includes a passage on how the *diestro* should defend himself from the strikes issuing from it.

In the low posture one has to take great care to occupy the straight line such that when the lowered sword is moving from one place to another with restlessness, the parallelogram, which is from one shoulder to another, is guarded, and in the tempo of the strike, to pull back the body, weighting it over the left leg, raising the sword to the line, and the sword, which is moving, will find the way blocked by the weighty body of the *diestro's* sword, with which he will cast it aside, outside of his parallelogram [...] the way and means which must be followed for security from this strike is to totally avoid finding the opponent's sword [towards his right side], but [towards his left side], the *diestro* raising his sword such that the pommel<sup>79</sup> is aimed at the

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<sup>75</sup> The Spanish uses '*parte*', "part", for what in English is commonly referred to as "line" in these contexts.

<sup>76</sup> Guerra de la Vega, *Comprehension de la destreza*, 1895 (cit.), p. 37

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 36–37

<sup>78</sup> Arrieta, *Resumen de la verdadera destreza*, 1688.

<sup>79</sup> *pomo*. The text adds *o manzanilla*, a synonym.

chest, so that [the] strong will be positioned behind a triangle, putting the weak of his sword below the strong of that of his opponent [...]<sup>80</sup>

Arrieta's advice is reminiscent of that of some of the other authors discussed here.

## II.5. Lorenz de Rada, Francisco (1695; 1705<sup>81</sup>)

Rada<sup>82</sup> first describes three Italian guards, the guard between the weapons, also called *la guardia à fianconata*, the guard below the weapons, or the half moon, and the guard of the outside, or iron gate.<sup>83</sup>

He then describes the form or mode of standing in guard in the beautiful Spanish stance (*la planta de Bella Española*),<sup>84</sup> which was of his own invention<sup>85</sup>. He will describe this stance again in his 1705 magnum opus. We translate from both texts, as indicated.

In the beautiful Spanish doctrine, or *desplante*,<sup>86</sup> and its teaching, all of the precepts which we have given in the teaching of the body held erect are observed, only differing in two things: one, in the position and placement of the body, since in this beautiful Spanish [stance] it is altered<sup>87</sup>, reducing its height, opening the feet the amount necessary to be able to correspond to that of the opponent with whom one has to fight, whether French or Italian. The other is, the one who in this position alters<sup>88</sup> one's stance [cannot move one's feet as one normally

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<sup>80</sup> Arrieta, *Resumen de la verdadera destreza*, 1688, pp. 10–12.

<sup>81</sup> Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705.

<sup>82</sup> Francisco Lorenz de Rada, *Crisol de la verdadera destreza, y Filosofía Matemática de las Armas, donde se purifica el oro de la verdad*, Cádiz, Cristóbal de Requena, 1695, pp. 258–260.

<sup>83</sup> For descriptions of these guards, see Blair "The Neapolitan School...", pp. 12–14).

<sup>84</sup> The syntax is analogous to "eyes of pale blue" for "pale blue eyes" (e.g., Herman Melville, *Billy Budd, sailor: (an inside narrative)*(Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 84).

<sup>85</sup> Rada, *Crisol de la verdadera destreza*, 1695, pp 261–264.

<sup>86</sup> This is a term which will also be used by Ettenhard (Francisco Antonio de Ettenhard y Abarca, *Diestro italiano, y español, explican sus doctrinas con evidencias matemáticas, conforme a los preceptos de la verdadera destreza, y filosofía de las armas*, Madrid, Imprenta de Manuel Ruiz de Murga, 1697, p. 58). We might translate it here as "altered" or even "extended stance". According to the dictionary of the Spanish Royal Academy, *desplantar* means "to deviate a little from the plumb line" (so, to cease being completely vertical or upright), but also, in dancing and fencing, "to lose *la planta* (the positioning of the feet)", a word which we are translating as "stance". The context favors the specialized meaning. Ettenhard's usage also favors the specialized meaning, since in the case he is describing the carriage of the upper body does not deviate from the vertical.

<sup>87</sup> "it is extended".

<sup>88</sup> "extends".

would otherwise] without much work and risk. In everything else [...] the same requisites are observed which we have mentioned [...]<sup>89</sup>

In order for our *diestro* to stand in the beautiful Spanish stance, it is necessary that from the position in which the body is found when it stands in the right angle, and over the base of the isosceles triangle which the feet and thighs form,<sup>90</sup> one reduces this figure to another with more sides, which Euclid called *trapezio*.<sup>91</sup> To do this, the *diestro*, taking the left foot [as the center of one's own circle],<sup>92</sup> will extend the right foot forward so that from the point to the heel of the left there is the distance that the sword has from the point to the quillons.<sup>93</sup> From the point at which the right foot starts to extend he will balance the body over the left, so that he holds his line of direction<sup>94</sup> from the left ear to the heel of the corresponding foot, and makes a straight line from the right foot to the head, holding the body profiled, easily, the head not making extremes, [up],<sup>95</sup> down, to one side or the other, the face firm, the eyes ready and sharp, so that in no event should their visual rays suffer any interposition whatever.<sup>96</sup>

In 1705 Rada will add that the left knee is very slightly bent, and that the distance from heel to heel is two and a half feet of space (that is, not counting the feet themselves in

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<sup>89</sup> Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, p. III. 554.

<sup>90</sup> This is the stance where the feet are held a foot or so apart, one heel in front of the other (Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, p. II 109), the body (for Rada) semi-profiled, and the sword and sword arm pointed straight forward, parallel to the ground.

<sup>91</sup> English usage has differed with respect to the use of “trapezium” and “trapezoid” depending on period and place. Therefore, to avoid introducing ambiguities by translating the Spanish term, we offer instead a translation of the meaning of the word Rada uses as found in the dictionary of the Spanish Royal Academy: ‘irregular quadrilateral which has only two of its sides parallel’.

<sup>92</sup> Rada elsewhere in this work identifies three circles: one in which either the left or right foot is the center, around which one can turn; one in which the halfway point between one and one's opponent is the center; one in which the opposing swordsman is the center. Here the left foot is being made the center of the first circle, because the right foot in this stance is displaced.

<sup>93</sup> This was set by law at no more than five fourths of a *vara*, or 1.04 meters (41.1 inches). Rada assumes the legal length.

<sup>94</sup> For Rada this corresponds to the center of gravity (Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, p. III 601; cf. Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, p. II 73).

<sup>95</sup> Supplied from the corresponding passage in Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, p. III 588.

<sup>96</sup> Rada, *Crisol de la verdadera destreza*, 1695, pp. 261–262.

the measurement)<sup>97</sup>. In an earlier passage describing this distance he will add “more or less (because in this one cannot have regularity, since people are not of equal stature)”<sup>98</sup>.

The sword must be positioned diagonally and below that of the opponent<sup>99</sup>. In 1705 Rada adds that “the right arm is extended so that it is not at its fullest extent; it is perceptibly bent at the elbow”<sup>100</sup>, and that the sword may be placed diagonally and above that of the opponent as well as diagonally and below. If the Italian should strike above the sword, the *diestro* will divert it, and if below, he will subject it<sup>101</sup>.

The left arm, from the elbow to the hand, is held in front of the body, the hand half a foot in front of it, a little portion of the dagger over the sword arm. The dagger is raised and pointed towards the top of the superior quillon of the sword with the shell facing the opponent<sup>102,103,104</sup>.

When the sword is held below that of the opponent, and the opponent strikes with his sword, one straightens the left leg and extends the right leg half a foot further, at the same time bringing the sword back towards the center line from its diagonal position, trapping the opponent’s sword between the superior quillon and sword of the *diestro*, above the *diestro*’s hilt, which is raised slightly above the horizontal, so that the *diestro*’s dagger is to the inside of the opponent’s sword, while the *diestro*’s sword is to its outside<sup>105,106,107</sup>). Rada describes a variant in which the Italian turns his hand fingernails down<sup>108,109,110</sup>. In the decade between the two works which we are considering, Rada will considerably develop the beautiful Spanish doctrine in opposition to the Italian<sup>111</sup>.

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<sup>97</sup> Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, p. III 588.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. III 554.

<sup>99</sup> Rada, *Crisol de la verdadera destreza*, 1695, p. 262.

<sup>100</sup> Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, p. III. 588.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. III. 588.

<sup>102</sup> The position of the dagger and dagger arm is reminiscent of Texedo.

<sup>103</sup> Rada, *Crisol de la verdadera destreza*, 1695, p. 262.

<sup>104</sup> Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, pp. III 588–589.

<sup>105</sup> The relatively passive role of the dagger is also reminiscent of Texedo.

<sup>106</sup> Rada, *Crisol de la verdadera destreza*, 1695, p. 269–270.

<sup>107</sup> Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, p. III. 589.

<sup>108</sup> In the Neapolitan texts, this is the position of the *imbroccata* (Mattei, *Della scherma napoletana*, 1699, p. 21).

<sup>109</sup> Rada, *Crisol de la verdadera destreza*, 1695, pp. 270–271.

<sup>110</sup> Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, p. III 598–599.

<sup>111</sup> Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, p. III 601–618.

## II.6. Tamariz, Nicolás (1696)<sup>112</sup>

Nicolás Tamariz, deputy *maestro mayor* for Seville, devotes a section of his work<sup>113</sup> on how to face an Italian which is based on Rada's beautiful Spanish stance. We mention it here only for completeness.

## II.7. Ettenhard y Abarca, Francisco Antonio de (1697)<sup>114</sup>

It is impossible to do justice to Ettenhard's 1697 treatise on the Spanish and Italian *diestro* in a short space. It is excellently argued, brilliantly presented, thoroughly and tightly written. While it deserves a full treatment, only a little of it can be presented.

Ettenhard, captain of the king's German guard, seeks to present a balanced view of a new style of Italian fencing, avoiding the extremes of excessive praise or excessive disapproval.<sup>115</sup>

As an example of his approach, he writes the following of an old-school Italian master, Salvator Fabris: "[...] and I can say, that in that which I have been able to reach with my limited understanding, I have recognized in this last author [Fabris] many approvable things that suffer calumny, because tempo cannot be written or drawn, and it is impossible to give action and movement to a printed figure."<sup>116</sup> He continues, "Don Luis Pacheco de Narváez lashed out at all of them (i.e., the Italians), but in all of his writings one cannot find an attempt to exclude or disapprove of this new style and foundation of the Italian *destreza*."<sup>117</sup>

Further on he writes that there are Spaniards who

are scandalized and astonished if they hear it said that the Italian practitioner has a basis in reason, and the capacity for science, and certain principles in which the means are assured and the ends are achieved with perfection. This culpable error arises by ignoring that science is one, that *destreza* is one, that, when founded in it, one works practical acts with excellent agility. One is the truth that it has [...] one

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<sup>112</sup> Tamariz: *Cartilla, y luz*, 1696.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., pp. 181–185.

<sup>114</sup> Francisco Antonio de Ettenhard y Abarca, *Diestro italiano, y español, explican sus doctrinas con evidencias matemáticas, conforme a los preceptos de la verdadera destreza, y filosofía de las armas*, Madrid, Imprenta de Manuel Ruiz de Murga, 1697.

<sup>115</sup> As argued in Luca Cecchinato, 'Note sulla Scherma Napoletana nella trattatistica spagnola coeva: D. Francisco Antonio de Ettenhard Abarca', in *Dal trattato alla sala d'armi* (Rome: Bonanno Editore, 2013) and Blair, 'The Neapolitan School...', pp. 22–23), Ettenhard is describing the Neapolitan school.

<sup>116</sup> Ettenhard, *Diestro italiano, y español*, 1697, p. 32.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.



the composition and perfect organization of man [...] one the essence of movement, with the distinction of natural and violent, according to the order of nature; one the essence of the line, with the difference of straight and curved; one that of the angle; one that of the step, and known its finite number and kind. The planes are one and the potency and possibility of working for the necessary formation of the *tretas*<sup>118</sup>.

Though Ettenhard minimizes Mendoza's contribution to this topic<sup>119</sup>, Mendoza had anticipated Ettenhard. In addition to what we have recorded above, he wrote:

All the writings which I have seen on the skill of arms say that it has six postures, or ways of holding the arm with the sword. These are straight, raised, lowered, raised to one side or the other, lowered to one side or the other, and back. True, all of this is teaching, but it is not taught as it should, because the most necessary thing, which *destreza* shows, is that when something has been broken up into opinions, it ought always to be united, because they are among the parts that comprise this matter.

This teaching has been divided among the nations, each one taking that posture that appears most proper to it for its mode of practice. Spaniards keep the straight posture. To one side or the other, resting the weight on the back foot, the French. Withdrawn, the Italians, with the posture which will be illustrated; obtuse<sup>120</sup>, the Africans; the Germans [follow the French] with little difference.<sup>121</sup> All of these postures are of the true skill without excepting any one of them from it, because one must know all of them, and their ways, which are not ignored by these nations [...] because all without exception are of service and use in this matter among men, even when they have their origins in different regions, kingdoms and provinces, because all are gifted by their Maker with the same natures, bigger and smaller, conforming to their stature [...] nor should anyone living neglect to practice them, availing himself of them for the exercise of the matters of which they treat, whether speculative or practical.

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>120</sup> I.e., raised.

<sup>121</sup> Arrieta (*Resumen de la verdadera destreza*, 1688, pp. 9–10, 12–14) contains a similar discussion.

This teaching is infallible, and instructs us by demonstrations, because the Divine Maker has served everyone by creating them in his image [...]<sup>122</sup>

Ettenhard says that a Spaniard cannot reach the Italian with his right-angled guard without being impeded and wounded by the Italian, but that the Italian, after his lunge (of the kind described above), achieves the right angle with more reality than the Spaniard can, using the Spaniard's typical approach to forming it. The advantage of the right angle is one of the universal means of defence established by Pacheco. Ettenhard continues, "all of the expressed pre-eminencies of the right angle, the Italian has them with greater perfection in his *desplante*, than the Spaniard in his stance" and if the Spaniard should wish to avoid the evident danger presented by the Italian, then "he will have to manage the body in another manner than that which, with immovable opinion, Don Luis counselled"<sup>123</sup>.

Furthermore, one cannot place the customary form of the *atajo* against the Italian because his sword is withdrawn. Finally, one cannot use the movement of conclusion<sup>124</sup> either, because its prerequisites are the right angle and the *atajo*, if one is going to do it safely.

One could go on and on citing passages in this vein, but the point which Ettenhard wants make to a contemporary Spaniard has been made sufficiently for our purposes. As he himself says at one point: "Much more copiously could I explain myself on this matter [...] but it would seem to me to be painful long-windedness [...]"<sup>125</sup>.

Having spent slightly more than half the book building the Italian up; he now faces the task of how to bring him down.

First, one has to have full knowledge of how an Italian fights. (This Ettenhard provides.) Second, one needs to practice incessantly, something the Italians do, "in order to achieve practical actions with greater perfection, because it is not otherwise possible to oppose quickness with delay, or knowledge with ignorance, and so it is necessary to be equally knowledgeable and equally prompt"<sup>126</sup>.

After analyzing the situation, he concludes that while the Italian has to move his sword forward a fair amount from its withdrawn position, the Spaniard only has to move his

<sup>122</sup> Ettenhard, *Diestro italiano, y español*, 1697, pp. 37r–37v.

<sup>123</sup> Francisco Antonio de Ettenhard y Abarca, *Compendio de los fundamentos de la verdadera destreza, y filosofía de las armas*, Madrid, Antonio de Zafra, 1675, p. 58.

<sup>124</sup> Arresting the opponent's sword hand, depriving him of the ability to use his sword, while presenting a threat to the opponent with one's own sword.

<sup>125</sup> Ettenhard, *Diestro italiano, y español*, 1697, p. 64.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

four fingers.<sup>127</sup> So, for opponents who are equally quick, the Spaniard still has to move less, even if the Italian moves first; so long as the Spaniard reacts promptly, he has the advantage. A downward movement for defence is stronger and shorter than a forward movement for offence, which will be weaker and slower. The Spaniard will apply greater degrees of force to the opponent's blade, to destroy the actions, corrupt the forms and deny the aims of his opponent. Therefore, it is not the case that the Italian's strike is incapable of being parried.

In an interesting display of period logic, he argues that if in fact the Italian's thrust could not be remedied, it would negate defence, and for this reason its use by the Italians would be prohibited and reproved by divine and human laws (which it is not)<sup>128</sup>.

The Spaniard's dagger is placed however necessary to close the line of attack<sup>129</sup>. The sword should be held, not directly forward, but slightly diagonally, to subject the opponent's weapon should it pass below, and divert it should it pass above<sup>130,131</sup>. The body is profiled<sup>132,133</sup>.

Since the Italian works in first intention, the Spanish *diestro* must always work in second intention<sup>134,135</sup>.

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<sup>127</sup> This, as we have seen, was Guerra de la Vega's conclusion as well. (Guerra de la Vega, *Comprehension de la destreza*, 1895).

<sup>128</sup> Ettenhard, *Diestro italiano, y español*, 1697, p. 128.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 154–155

<sup>130</sup> Rada will say the same in 1705, as we have seen. Ettenhard cites Pacheco (Ettenhard, *Diestro italiano, y español*, 1697, p. 157), who said, '[...] when the sword is above that of the opponent, it can do a perfect subjection and not diversion; and that which is inferior, can divert, but not subject' (Pacheco, *Nueva ciencia*, 1672, p. 316).

<sup>131</sup> Ettenhard, *Diestro italiano, y español*, 1697, pp. 155–157.

<sup>132</sup> This conforms to the Spanish doctrine mentioned above, that if the opponent should be squared, which the Italian whom Ettenhard's *diestro* is to oppose invariably is, then one should be profiled.

<sup>133</sup> Ettenhard, *Diestro italiano, y español*, 1697, pp. 155–158.

<sup>134</sup> Rada refers to the strikes of the Italian in first intention or first tempo, while the Spaniard works in second intention (Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, p. III 617–618). Villardita, an exponent of the Neapolitan school, clearly views acts in second intention, to which he devotes his second treatise, as inferior to those *di risoluzione* (Villardita, *La scherma illustrata*, 1673, pp. 5–6). Arrieta notes that Italians will work sometimes in first, sometimes in second intention, though in both cases the strikes are the same (Arrieta, *Resumen de la verdadera destreza*, 1688, p. 10). Marcelli equates *primo tempo* with *tempo di prima intentione* (Marcelli, Francesco Antonio, *Regole della scherma insegnate da Lelio, e Titta Marcelli scritte da Francesco Antonio Marcelli figlio, e nipote e maestro di scherma in Roma. Opera non meno utile, che necessaria à chiunque desidera far profitto in questa Professione*, Rome, Dom. Ant. Ercole, 1686, pp. Pt. 1, Bk. 1, Ch. VI, p. [21]), devoting the second book of Part One to “the actions done with the sword alone in first intention, or in first tempo”, and the third book of Part

He describes one such defence: as the Italian attacks, the Spaniard lowers his weapon to meet the Italian's sword arm with the point, tucking his middle in a little, the dagger cutting off the lines and directions of the opposing sword<sup>136,137</sup>.

He admits that the precepts he has proposed against the Italian manner of fighting might seem impossible, yet this is not so, except for the timid and lazy<sup>138</sup>. He makes an analogy which Sir William Hope will use ten years later.

What appears more difficult than the art which tightrope-walkers practice, since, without a doubt, had it not been seen, it were not temerity to consider it impossible, denying it credit. We see that they do it, walking the length of a cord with the width of an inch, suspended at a great height, staring at death in the drop on one side and the other. Notwithstanding such a difficult proposition, we know that by the continual repetition of acts, it becomes habit, and with long habit, nature, obtaining such security, that without alteration of spirit, the heart still, the sight disregarding dangers [...] this is achieved by means of a long and accustomed habit.

One could adduce many examples like this, since without doubt the ability of men reaches so elevated a point of perfection in all training that its execution appears beyond the natural. It is achieved by means of continuous practical work, and speculative study.<sup>139,140</sup>

Towards the end of the work<sup>141</sup>, Ettenhard makes an interesting theoretical argument. Pacheco had argued that all proportionate means are both dispositive and privative<sup>142</sup>.

One to “actions undertaken with the sword alone for defence and for riposte, or second intention”.

<sup>135</sup>Ettenhard, *Diestro italiano, y español*, 1697, pp. 163–164.

<sup>136</sup> As opposed to line of direction, which we have encountered previously, Rada defines lines of direction as ‘those which can be extended without impediment from one combatant to others’ (Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, p. II 73).

<sup>137</sup> Ettenhard, *Diestro italiano, y español*, 1697, pp. 148–151.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>139</sup> “[...] this irresistible power of practice, does not only master and overcome the unflexibleness of our bodily members, but also affects, and prevails very much, even over our more dull and ignorant judgments ... did not people daily see, the surprising tricks of legerdemain, and feats of activity, performed by jug[g]lers, rope-dancers, and tumblers, they could neither believe, that it were possible in nature, for men to perform, with any assurance, such astonishing tricks and postures, as they do; and which it is very well known, they only attain to, by an assiduous and daily practice.” (Hope, *A New, Short, and Easy Method of Fencing*, 1707, pp. 35–36).

<sup>140</sup> Ettenhard, *Diestro italiano, y español*, 1697, p. 192.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 1697, p. 182

They give the *diestro* an opportunity for executing an attack, while at the same time depriving the opponent of that opportunity. If, therefore, there is a proportionate mean, the execution of one's strike cannot be impeded. If it can be impeded, then there is no proportionate mean. But it has been shown that the execution of the Italian's strike can be impeded. Therefore, the Italian is not striking from the proportionate mean, or the place from where an attack may be correctly executed.

Ettenhard proceeds to state<sup>143</sup> that the Italian's method of attacking does not consist of (a) gaining the proportionate mean, and (b) executing the attack; rather, the attack is in execution while the proportionate mean is being gained. The two happen together. This is contrasted to what Pacheco says,

that the *diestro* works more perfectly when he chooses first the proportionate mean of a *treta* and then executes it, than when he seeks the mean and the execution together, because security is only found in the mean of proportion, or in the proportionate, and between the one and the other there is a middle distance which does not participate in the nature of any one of them, and so it is necessary to cross it very carefully, with cautious circumspection.<sup>144</sup>

This the Italian does not do.

Given the constraints of space, this text has not been done the justice it deserves. It is a masterpiece of deftly applying and at the same time updating Pacheco for a significant environmental change. It is a magnificent tour de force, thoughtful, thorough and balanced.

## II.8. d'Alessandro, Giuseppe (1711)<sup>145</sup>

The collected works of Giuseppe d'Alessandro, a Neapolitan duke, contains a passage describing how a Spaniard would deal with a thrust from a Neapolitan swordsman.

[...] because the Spaniard has every bit of knowledge of the Neapolitan measure and play, he will easily dodge the thrust with that skillful way of theirs that they use: when they lunge, slipping the right foot behind, and so bending themselves they remove their belly from the opponent's measure, and since their adversary is completely

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p. 454.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., p. 190

<sup>145</sup> D'Alessandro, Giuseppe, *Opera di d. Giuseppe D'Alessandro duca di Peschiolanciano divisa in cinque libri*, Naples, Antonio Muzio, 1723. The first edition was published in 1711. Citations are to the expanded 1723 edition.

outstretched with the extension of the lunge, they will always have the freedom to strike the face or the head.<sup>146</sup>

While this passage is not central to our thesis, we provide it for completeness and for its intrinsic interest. Although it is not certain that d'Alessandro is describing a practitioner of *la verdadera destreza*, it is not unlikely, given the description of the Spanish mode of play on the preceding page.<sup>147</sup>

### III. CONCLUSION

If one believes that Pacheco de Narváez represents the last word in the practical part of *la verdadera destreza*, then the Spanish response to the Italian fencing tradition during the reign of Carlos II and the War of the Spanish Succession (1665–1714) might be seen as representing its breakdown when faced with a new situation, because while some

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<sup>146</sup> D'Alessandro, *Opera di d. Giuseppe D'Alessandro*, 1723, p. 22. The illustration on page 769 shows the Spaniard responding to the bent-knee lunge of sword alone, not the stiff-knee lunge of sword and dagger, in this fashion.

<sup>147</sup> “[...]The Spaniard plays marvellously well, stately, upright, and consequently more strongly, and with more ability to resist. He steps lightly, now here, now there, without extending his step much. He holds the sword high, straight, and with a small motion of the hand turns the guard with his fingers now up, and now down, which they call *uñes avaho*, *uñes ariva*. They keep the arm straight, and seek to guard more than any other thing the upper parts: the top of the chest, the face and the head, because when they play amongst themselves, upright, the cuts and the thrusts always land in those places, also the arm and the right shoulder, although sometimes, when the swords are joined, they let go, sometimes with a *ricavazione*, sometimes avoiding with the edge the opposing sword to give a light thrust to the right side, without bending the torso very much, but turning their feet towards that part, returning to the opposition of blades, or to grips, which these Spaniards do with more force and less entanglement than the French. Their cuts are no less skillful than forceful, without arm movement, but only strong of the fist, and because they are used to it, they make them descend like lightning. Their thrusts, except for the *mugnetta*, all the others do not penetrate so much as the Italian, because the Spaniard, holding the arm extended, cannot launch them with the force of the Italian, who holds it bent. So, instead of extending, they only prick, so that it enters to the extent that their opponent moves in too closely. Said play appears more amongst them than amongst other nationals who, playing low, and in stance, those little details, elegances, skillful *rincavi*, strong and intricate bindings of the sword are not seen as are seen amongst them, who, playing equally tall, intertwine themselves in this way.” (D'Alessandro, *Opera di d. Giuseppe D'Alessandro*, 1723, p. 21).

*Mugnetta* is a regional word for a curved knife (Ernesto Giammarco, *Dizionario Abruzzese e Molisano*, Rome, Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1969). To determine the kind of thrust it designates here requires further research. D'Alessandro's use of *rincavo* and related words elsewhere (D'Alessandro, *Opera di d. Giuseppe D'Alessandro*, 1723, pp. 483–492) suggests actions that free the sword. Mattei uses *ricavi* as a synonym for *ricavate* in the same sense (Mattei, *Della scherma napoletana*, 1699, pp. 120–122).

responses might share some common elements, their variety might suggest some disarray. However, such a conclusion, and such a belief, is not supported by the texts.

Mendoza wrote that the infallible principles of the skill of arms were begotten of the first cause, despite the claims of various authors to be the progenitor<sup>148</sup>. Rada writes, “And so the reasoning of this science [...] has discovered [...] this proportional mean”<sup>149</sup>. Pacheco had written that the movement of conclusion “is the most powerful which the art has discovered or could discover [...]”<sup>150</sup>. There is a consistency of understanding at the beginning and end of this period that *la verdadera destreza* is the product of principles that anyone with the requisite knowledge could discover and apply, not the invention of any one person.<sup>151</sup> *La verdadera destreza* was regarded as a science. If science is pressed to move in certain directions, that does not make it any the less science. Science is about method, or the methodical approach to achieving results, which is what makes those results scientific.

In period, *la verdadera destreza* dealt with the problem whether it was pure or applied science, since it had both theoretical and practical parts. Certainly, the practical application of science, in fields like engineering, can produce more than one valid result, more than one way to successfully bridge a river, for example. This is not to argue whether *la verdadera destreza* was or was not science, but its practitioners claimed that it was, according to the period understanding of science, and as such it did demonstrate the ability to continue moving forward using a scientific method based on Aristotle and Euclid to account for new problems.

Our texts strongly suggest that the right-angled posture associated with *la verdadera destreza* is not an integral part of it, but rather an application of first principles to particular situations involving particular opponents where that approach made sense. The textual evidence would seem to support this conclusion: in different situations against different opponents, while some might work from the customary stance, others would alter it after careful analysis.

Tamariz considered Ettenhard and Rada as *autores clásicos*,<sup>152</sup> and uses them as the basis of his text in addition to Pacheco. With respect to Rada’s beautiful Spanish stance, he

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<sup>148</sup> Mendoza, *Resumen de la verdadera destreza*, 1675, p. 22v.

<sup>149</sup> Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, p. III 84.

<sup>150</sup> Luis Pacheco de Narváez. *Engaño y Desengaño de los Errores q[ue] se han q[ue]rido introducir en la destreza de las armas*, Madrid, Emprenta del Reyno, 1635, p. 95r.

<sup>151</sup> Pacheco had expressed himself on this point as follows: ‘According to Aristotle and all those who entered by the gate of wisdom, science must consist of immutable and eternal things, and although that of arms cannot be eternal with respect to men, I mean known in its origin, it is with respect to its nature, because this like the rest did not divorce itself from the Divine mind, where all of them were and are (although one can say inventor, a parte post, the one who knew and discovered it first) ...’ (Pacheco, *Engaño y Desengaño*, 1635, p. 58v).

<sup>152</sup> Tamariz: *Cartilla, y luz*, 1696, pp. vi, Introduction.

writes that it was pulled “from the requisites and advice of Don Luis Pacheco Narváez [...]”<sup>153</sup>, and provides an assessment to that effect<sup>154</sup>. This suggests that even a seeming innovation such as Rada’s could be accepted and promoted as part of *la verdadera destreza*.

Ettenhard’s response makes the most effort to reference Pacheco. However, Ettenhard might be seen as creative in his interpretation of *la verdadera destreza*. While Juan Caro de Montenegro, *Maestro Mayor de la facultad de la verdadera destreza del manejo de las armas*<sup>155</sup> of Spain, would allow that a license might be issued for the 1667 treatise of Arias de Porres<sup>156</sup> to be published, because, “although it does not contain anything that might advance the writings of Don Luis Pacheco de Narváez, it is very adequate with respect to *la verdadera destreza*, and mathematical rules, and sure demonstrations [...]”, (front matter) he initially challenged some of what Ettenhard had written in 1675<sup>157</sup>. Ettenhard had to respond to those challenges to Montenegro’s satisfaction before the treatise could be published<sup>158,159</sup>.

In short, the response to the challenge presented to aficionados of *la verdadera destreza* by Italian fencers tests the competing hypotheses, whether *la verdadera destreza* was a system of fencing, with a particular set of rules, or whether it was a systematic approach to self-defence, adaptable to different environments. The response argues in favor of the latter, though why a systematic approach to self-defence and not fencing needs clarification.

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<sup>153</sup> Tamariz: *Cartilla, y luz*, 1696, p. 179.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 179–180.

<sup>155</sup> Chief instructor of the faculty of the true skill of the handling of weapons.

<sup>156</sup> Porres, *Resumen De La Verdadera Destreza*, 1667,

<sup>157</sup> Ettenhard, *Compendio de los fundamentos de la verdadera destreza*, 1675, pp. 247–275.

<sup>158</sup> However, Antonio Yuste Iuer, *Maestro de la Filosofía Matemática de las Armas en esta Corte*, (Instructor in the Mathematical Philosophy of Weapons in this Court) commented on what both Ettenhard and the *maestro mayor* had to say. (Ettenhard, *Diestro italiano*, 1697) This suggests that the *maestro mayor* did not in fact have the last word on what constituted *la verdadera destreza*, though he had the authority to grant teaching licenses, and to allow that licenses for publication might be issued. Again, this suggests that no one person could define what constituted *la verdadera destreza*. The penultimate subject which Rada addresses in his 1705 magnum opus concerns the criteria for selecting a *maestro mayor*. This again suggests that an authority of his stature could freely express his views on the subject, one where, among other things, he contrasts *el manejo de las armas* (the handling of weapons) from a display of *una vulgar esgrima* (common fencing) (Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, p. III 619).

<sup>159</sup> Ettenhard, *Compendio de los fundamentos de la verdadera destreza*, 1675, pp. 277–338.



## IV. APPENDIX

### IV.1. Ethical Considerations

There were conflicting views about duelling in Spain.<sup>160</sup> One point of view is expressed by the following, written in 1550 in Madrid.

The duel in our age, due to the lack of generous enthusiasm and of the heroic instincts of other epochs, is a moral progress that defends societies and customs against an egotistical civilization, and helps impede the complete degradation of humankind, in this century lacking in great virtues and vacillating in its beliefs.<sup>161</sup>

The Council of Trent (1545–63) had banned the duel in no uncertain terms.<sup>162</sup> “Philip II. accepted [its decrees] for Spain [...] and Sicily so far as they did not infringe on the royal prerogative.”<sup>163</sup>

While Carmona recognized the duel<sup>164</sup>, Pacheco did not.

Just before he died Pacheco wrote the following:

And because there are men who do not want for others what they want for themselves, it is possible that some of them take exception to the fact that the opponent can do the same to the *diestro*, when it is the latter who attacked, restricting the potency, with which neither can wound, and they would come to remain equal, without there being a winner or loser between them, and the one being obligated to satisfy, could not do it.<sup>165</sup>

To this I respond, as learned and Christian, that this *destreza*, and the science upon which it is founded, was invented for the defence of this individual man, jointly, without regard for the laws of the duel, because of insult or affront, with the promise that to the extent that

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<sup>160</sup> See, for example, Claude Chauchadis, *La Loi du duel: Le code du point d'honneur dans l'Espagne des XVIe-XVIIe siècles* (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 1997), pp. 283–286.

<sup>161</sup> Enrique de Leguina, *Torneos, jineta, rieptos y desafíos*, Madrid, Librería de Fernando Fé, pp. 128–130.

<sup>162</sup> The relevant section is given in Chauchadis, *La Loi du duel*, 1997, p. 154.

<sup>163</sup> *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge XII (The new Schaff-Herzog encyclopedia of religious knowledge, embracing Biblical, historical, doctrinal, and practical theology, and Biblical, theological, and ecclesiastical biography from the earliest times to the present day*, ed. by Samuel Macauley Jackson (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1908–1912), p. 3).

<sup>164</sup> Carmona, *Avisos importantes para el diestro*, [ca. 1639]. MS., cit. 1899, pp. 34–35.

<sup>165</sup> This is a clear reference to the duel.

he should observe its precepts, its assistance will not fail, but that it was not and is not obliged to supplement the ignorance or the mishaps of the carelessness or delay of its user; here he is on his own. And as a philosopher he can say that between the active and the passive action, receiving between the two combatants (whether on foot, on horseback, with whatsoever arms, equal or unequal) it is necessary for it to be proportioned in such manner that whatever one can receive, so can the other do, and that when the potential for receiving is lacking, the potential to act will be lacking [...] so that no effect will follow, and both will remain defended, except that *destreza* is discredited for this, rather than meriting supreme praise, by having defended both, and not rendered either unprotected.<sup>166,167</sup>

A few years earlier he had written that

[...] because the generosity and nobility of this science would have been voided had it not looked equally to the defence of both skilled combatants and had only arranged for the defence of one and offence of the other, it discovered, like a mother and defender of every single individual who would enter by its gate and penetrate its recesses, two means (*medios*) [etc.]<sup>168,169</sup>

We might summarize the points being made in the preceding as follows. *La verdadera destreza* is not about duelling. It is ill-suited for duelling, because two opponents who are equal in skill and knowledge cannot defeat one another: *la verdadera destreza* is designed to protect both combatants equally. *La verdadera destreza* is about self-defence.

Subsequent authors will elaborate and expand on these themes.

“The *destreza* of arms is true science, because it consist of infallible demonstrations [...]”<sup>170,171</sup> If it fails, it will not be its own fault, but that of the person doing the work, failing to understand any of its parts, whether theoretical or practical<sup>172</sup>.

Take note that this idea of our fort<sup>173</sup> which we have imagined for the *diestro* without any difference we imagine for his opponent, from which

<sup>166</sup> Rada will cite this passage (Rada, *Crisol de la verdadera destreza*, 1695, pp. 273–274).

<sup>167</sup> Pacheco, *Advertencias*, 1642, pp. 58r–59r.

<sup>168</sup> The maternal (*madre*) and hence feminine (*defensora*) imagery which Pacheco applies to *la verdadera destreza* cannot be allowed to pass unremarked.

<sup>169</sup> Pacheco, *Engaño y Desengaño*, 1635, p. 63v.

<sup>170</sup> “[...] *destreza* is demonstrable science [...]” (Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, p. I To the Reader [vi]).

<sup>171</sup> Mendoza, *Principios de los cinco sujetos principales*, 1672, p. 31r.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32r.

it follows that if both are *diestros*, and each one knows how to defend himself in his fort, the one will not be able to offend the other [...] and only in carelessness will he be able to find an avenue for offence.<sup>174</sup>

[...] when *diestros* are equal, [the dispositions and strikes] will continue infinitely<sup>175</sup> [...] because from the corruption of some there will be new generation of others, going on infinitely.<sup>176</sup> [Both swordsmen] work in a matter which proceeds infinitely, and that which is not done in this way, but with the expediency of the moment, is not *verdadera destreza*, nor art, but a whim of the one doing it [...]<sup>177</sup> [...] unless they lack the knowledge of what to do [...] [both will execute their strikes alternately] without harming each other, by corrupting, both of them, the forward movement, which is that which effects the strike, so that they will work infinitely [...] neither of them having the power to effect execution [...]<sup>178</sup>

[...] both opponents will be able, if they are equal in *destreza*, to proceed infinitely without being struck, which is the greatest grandeur of this true science.<sup>179,180</sup>

In 1688 Arrieta wrote:

[...] there will not be a man with such a weak spirit and such frigid thoughts that when he faces the loss of his life [...] will not find the strength to defend himself, because were he not to do it, he would, in my opinion, fall into two sins. The first is that of ingratitude, and the other is that of despair, which is the greatest baseness of all. The first is found in him who kills himself, or lets himself be killed when able to defend

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<sup>173</sup> An analogy Rada uses.

<sup>174</sup> Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, p. II 154.

<sup>175</sup> Indefinitely.

<sup>176</sup> Mendoza, *Resumen de la verdadera destreza*, 1675, p. 17v

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., pp. 18r–18v.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p. 31v

<sup>179</sup> Villardita ends his second treatise with these words: ‘There is no doubt that for two gentlemen trained according to the advice I have given above, the ability to strike will be impossible because with these actions a continuous fight comes to take shape where one never sees a pause nor will either be allowed to come into measure, unless through some deficiency through being unwise with respect to the profession of true fencing (*vera scherma*), or by one’s own fault, as is always wont to happen in all the sciences, and professions.’ (Villardita, *La scherma illustrata*, 1673, pp. 15–16)

<sup>180</sup> Texedo, *Escuela de principiantes*, 1678, p. 55.

himself.<sup>181</sup> The second is, when the man does not resist as he has an obligation to do, he holds his life in low esteem, because it cost our creator and redeemer Christ so much, since he died to give it to us, and when one lets himself be killed, he esteems little the much which he received, because he has an obligation to protect himself, since God protects him, and not to let himself be killed, except to uphold the Catholic faith, and by the blessed counsels of the Evangelists, if he does this, in this case he will gain much by losing little. And since this is a thing so desired by God, that man, who was born to serve him, and never offend him, and thank him for the mercies which he has shown in making him a man, and not an animal, to make him Christian, and not gentile, that he should lose his life by his own fault, or let it be taken away by anyone, instead of making an effort to protect the possession in which God has put the soul, and exert every possible effort in his defence, so that, if he cannot defend himself without offending, he offends in the way he can.<sup>182</sup>

A decade earlier Texedo had written:

From the queen of the faculties, theology, the true *diestro* takes the form of conforming himself to divine and natural precepts, so that without wounding or killing, he will know how to attend to his own defence, excepting those cases in which he runs the clear risk of life, because in these cases any precept ceases, because it will be homicide of oneself if one does not defend oneself, even if it should result in the injury or death of another, since charity begins with oneself.<sup>183</sup>

Self-defence is not simply a natural right; it is a moral duty, the means for doing which *la verdadera destreza* provides. This view conforms to that of Thomas Aquinas who, had written<sup>184</sup>:

A single act may have two effects, of which one alone is intended, whilst the other is incidental to that intention. But the way a moral act is to be classified depends on what is intended, not on what goes beyond such an intention, since this is merely incidental thereto [...] In light of

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<sup>181</sup> Cf. Antonio Yuste Iuer: “[...] if one is able to wound or kill in order to remain defended, but does not do it and lets himself die, it will be homicide of oneself, and he would commit [the sin of] despair.” (Ettenhard, *Compendio de los fundamentos*, 1675, p. 361).

<sup>182</sup> Arrieta, *Resumen de la verdadera destreza*, 1688, pp. 112–114.

<sup>183</sup> Texedo, *Escuela de principiantes*, 1678, pp. iv, To the Reader.

<sup>184</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Volume 38. Injustice (2a2æ. 63–79) Latin text, English translation, Introduction, Notes, Appendices & Glossary, see edition of Marcus Lefébure (London and New York: Blackfriars, 1975).

this distinction we can see that an act of self-defence may have two effects: the saving of one's own life, and the killing of the attacker. Now such an act of self-defence is not illegitimate just because the agent intends to save his own life, because it is natural for anything to want to preserve itself in being if it can. An act that is properly motivated may, nevertheless, become vitiated if it is not proportionate to the end intended. And this is why somebody who uses more violence than is necessary to defend himself will be doing something wrong. On the other hand, the controlled use of counter-violence constitutes legitimate self-defence, for according to the law *it is legitimate to answer force with force provided it goes no further than due defence requires*. Moreover, a person is not obliged under pain of loss of eternal life to renounce the use of proportionate counter-force in order to avoid killing another, for a man is under a greater obligation to care for his own life than for another's. (Summa Theologiæ, 2a2æ. 64, 7; emphasis original.)

The notion of proportionate use of force is found throughout the *destreza* literature. In Arrieta we read:

[...] there has to be moderation in the weapons, so that one can call it proportionate defence, because if there is unfair<sup>185</sup> advantage on the part of the one who defends himself, whether with respect to weapons, the number of kin or friends [present], there defence ceases to be called just.<sup>186</sup>

Both offence and defence can be just or unjust, and in such a difference, offence may be exceeded with respect to defence, or defence with respect to offence, and in this consideration one and the other may be understood to be noble, or vile.<sup>187</sup>

Views such as these were not confined to Spain. The Sicilian master Pallavicini writes that the use of force should be proportionate to the skill of the opponent:

[...] especially in those persons with little practice, who might have sufficient spirit, but do not know any rule whatsoever of fencing; such people must be punished moderately, that is, since he [the trained fencer] is able to kill his opponent with a few thrusts, [but] since he [the opponent] is completely disordered in his striking [...] Fencing teaches that in these situations one must thrust instantly [...]

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<sup>185</sup> Literally, "much".

<sup>186</sup> Arrieta, *Resumen de la verdadera destreza*, 1688, pp. 114–115.

<sup>187</sup> Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, p. I 4.

but that, which many old authors teach, they say that it is against all reason, because to kill one of these is exactly like killing an animal, and also against divine law. One has to castigate another way, that is to hit him with a blow to the head, or arm, and so fencing with a naked blade has to be approached with discretion.<sup>188</sup>

In *la verdadera destreza*, these views predominated.

[...] [the sole institute of *destreza* is] to defend man from man, wherefore Narváez says it was to be used by the most religious [...] not only does it preserve the life of the *diestro*, but through it the *diestro* preserves that of his opponent. Rarely do the prudent have the need to kill [...]

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[This *destreza*] has for its primary and principal object one's own defence without offence of the opponent, conforming to the precept of the law, *alterum non laedere*,<sup>190</sup> and secondary, and less principal, just and necessary offence, *cum moderamine inculpatae tutelae*.<sup>191,192</sup>

Pacheco had written that Carmona is speaking like a mechanic, mechanically<sup>193</sup>

with little attention to divine and natural law, which I religiously looked at, when I posited, that it was only looking to the defence of the *diestro* without injuring his neighbor, which is the most justifiable action according to our sacred religion, and he, departing from it, and my approach, says that the *treta* that is good and true awaits no more occasion than seeking its proportionate mean with its components, and that, when it has been selected, there must be an irremediable wound, making it impossible for the skilled and Christian man, to avoid killing, and to be a voluntary murderer, in which, in addition to being an act against charity, resolving it this way, injures the generosity and nobility of this science, making him a killer,<sup>194</sup> and also offends the proportionate mean, making it necessarily executive,

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<sup>188</sup> Pallavicini, *La scherma illustrate*, 1670, p. 32.

<sup>189</sup> Porres, *Resvmen De La Verdadera Destreza*, 1667, p. 142.

<sup>190</sup> “to injure no one” (Justinian’s Institutes 1, 1, 3–4).

<sup>191</sup> Pacheco had used the same language in the same context (Pacheco, *Engaño y Desengaño*, 1635, p. 38r).

<sup>192</sup> Santos de la Paz, *Ilustración de la destreza indiana*, 1712, p. 160.

<sup>193</sup> *habla como mecánico* (Pacheco, *Engaño y Desengaño*, 1635, p. 94v). *En esto, como en lo demas, habló mecanicamente* (ibid., p. 6r).

<sup>194</sup> Ettenhard begins citing this passage at this point (Ettenhard, *Compendio de los fundamentos*, 1675, pp. 270–271).

because, as I have said, whoever chooses it, has to cause three effects at most, which are disposition, subjection and privation, and at least two, disposition and privation, because the *diestro* is in a position to execute a strike,<sup>195</sup> and the opponent is deprived of the power to strike. Since he will be free from this danger, he will be well able to refrain from injuring.

Three examples will show this truth: the *tretas* of first intention by the position of the sword [...] begin with the *atajo*, in whose proportionate mean are discovered the three stated effects. Forthwith the *diestro* could be well satisfied with the subjection and privation that he will have done, and not use the disposition to strike. [An]other, if in whatever proportionate mean of the *tretas generales*,<sup>196</sup> he will have disposition and the opponent will have privation; with this security, he will also be able to refrain from killing. And finally, the movement of conclusion is the most powerful which the art has discovered or could discover, because it is the only one which destroys the opponent's acts and deprives him of his power; therefore, to say that when this is done, it obliges the *diestro* to wound, or to kill, is to oblige him to sin, so that he cannot say that it is with the just moderation of defence.<sup>197</sup>

Antonio Yuste showed that one could take this too far, after Ettenhard stated that “permission to wound can never be given except where it is required for defence”<sup>198</sup> by pointing out

that there are cases where one cannot stop from wounding precisely so as to remain defended, as for example let us give that should the opponent be of great strength and the *diestro* who performs the movement of conclusion should be weak, how must one grip him without the risk of being wounded? Because seeing that the *diestro* cannot remove the instrumental cause from his hand by force, it is necessary to appeal to the destruction of the efficient cause, wounding, or killing, in order to remain defended, or else to abandon

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<sup>195</sup> “wound”.

<sup>196</sup> The reference is to the four general *tretas*, the cross-line, the narrowing, the weak under and the weak over the strong, which correspond to the two edges and two flats of a sword-blade, as follows: the weak over the strong is done to the superior edge; the weak below the strong is done to the inferior edge; the cross-line is done to the outside flat; the narrowing is done to the inside flat (Antonio Yuste Iuer, in Ettenhard, *Compendio de los fundamentos*, 1675, p. 356).

<sup>197</sup> Pacheco, *Engaño y Desengaño*, 1635, pp. 94v-95r.

<sup>198</sup> Ettenhard, *Compendio de los fundamentos*, 1675, p. 328.

the movement of conclusion and go back to square one,<sup>199</sup> losing the finest thing of the science, and returning to the beginning of the battle [...] in these cases the *diestro* must wound, although he has performed the movement of conclusion [...] in such cases, one must first secure one's life, even if one deprives one's opponent of it.<sup>200</sup>

Once again this is in accord with the view of Thomas Aquinas. One avoids wounding or killing to the extent possible, but in cases of grave and imminent danger, one's duty is to oneself first.

Pacheco had written that when one “voluntarily deprives oneself of the power to wound”, provided that it is not required for self-defence, it is “an admirable effect and worthy of all praise since it teaches its practitioner that one can overcome oneself, which is a more glorious victory than overcoming another”<sup>201</sup>.

Arias de Porres subsequently observed that “he who is moved by anger should not hope for a good end [...] Whoever does not know how to conquer himself cannot hope to conquer his adversary”<sup>202</sup>.

The *verdadera destreza* of Pacheco is a systematic, ethical approach to self-defence grounded in self-mastery. Its pinnacle is in not finding oneself placed in a position of having to defend oneself at all.

The practitioner of *destreza* will experience, among other fruits, new spirit, corruption of any innate fear. He will gain heightened common esteem, tranquil peace, because to the extent that they judge him skilled (*diestro*), no one will provoke him, because challenges have their origin in the weakness or inability of him who suffers them<sup>203,204</sup>.

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<sup>199</sup> *y salirse al medio.*

<sup>200</sup> Ettenhard, *Compendio de los fundamentos*, 1675, pp. 360–361.

<sup>201</sup> Pacheco, *Engaño y Desengaño*, 1635, p. 63v.

<sup>202</sup> Porres, *Resymen De La Verdadera Destreza*, 1667, p. 5.

<sup>203</sup> Giuseppe D'Alessandro wrote the following of Giovanni Mattei, who taught his younger brother Francesco Antonio Mattei, and Mattei's fellow student, Giuseppe Villardita, how to fence (D'Alessandro, *Opera di d. Giuseppe*, 1723, p. 20); the younger Mattei and Villardita would go on to compose treatises on Neapolitan fencing. “Sig. Giovanni de Mattei [...] possessed [...] the mastery of sword and dagger with supreme perfection ... and was highly esteemed among the masters in this city [Naples] [...]. He always sought to live quietly, avoiding brawls and confrontations and knew how to act so that he was never forced to remove his sword from its scabbard [...] neither was he held in contempt; rather, everyone bore him due respect, and he never lost the reverence due him as a good master, and also for his moderate habits, fitness of mind, and moderated will” (D'Alessandro, *Opera di d. Giuseppe*, 1723, p. 344).

<sup>204</sup> Porres, *Resymen De La Verdadera Destreza*, 1667, p. ii, Prologue to the Reader.



Rada defines *la verdadera destreza* as “a habit, which is acquired by exercise based on demonstration, by certain, evident and necessary principles, deduced from the reasoning of this science, for the defence and offence in the battle of two opponents”<sup>205</sup> (Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, p. II 54).

The practice of arms involves body, mind and spirit.

Among the noble arts, necessary to the republic, Pedro Gregorio<sup>206</sup> admits in the first place those that are useful to the body or the soul, and of these, by their greatest pre-eminence, he qualifies letters and arms. And of arms, the gymnastic exercise, which, as has been repeated,<sup>207</sup> is the meditation and exercise of the sword and pole-arm, and, he notes, that it pertains to the formation of the spirit, but with such measure,<sup>208</sup> that it does not pass to excess, because [then] they will be athletes<sup>209,210</sup>.

It is a physical exercise informed by the intellect, or the systematic application of reason and science, as science was understood during this period, and ethics, which was expressed in period language; Carranza, for example, had entitled his work, *Libro [...] Que trata de la filosofía de las armas. Y de su destreza y de la agresión y defensión cristiana*. This *verdadera destreza de las armas*, the true skill of arms, is not solely about hitting without being hit,<sup>211</sup> though it includes that knowledge.<sup>212</sup> It is about not being injured or killed,

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<sup>205</sup>“ [...] for Aristotle and St. Thomas, science is not a proposition or a set of propositions, a ‘body of knowledge’, as it is sometimes called. Science is not an idea or a body of ideas in a system, as it is for many modern philosophers. Instead, for Aristotle and St. Thomas, philosophy or science is a habit. A habit is the perfection of a certain power or faculty to know or demonstrate skill in repeated ways” (Curtis L. Hancock, *The Nature of Metaphysics and Science: The Problem of the One and the Many in Thomas Aquinas, Metaphysics* (Rijeka: InTech, 2012), p. 68). Cf. ‘*la ciencia es un hábito cierto y evidente deducido de premisas ciertas y evidentes ...*’ (Carmona, Avisos importantes para el diestro, [ca. 1639]. MS., cit. 1899, p. 10).

<sup>206</sup> Pierre Grégoire (c. 1540–1597), French jurist and philosopher.

<sup>207</sup> A few lines earlier.

<sup>208</sup> *medio*.

<sup>209</sup> Galen, who was still regarded as the primary medical authority in Spain during this period, despised the extremes to which professional athletes would go, as demonstrated by the following lampoon. ‘But what about the story of Milo of Kroton? He once did a lap of the stadium with a sacrificed bull on his shoulders. What incredible stupidity that was! Not to realize that just a little earlier, while it was alive, the animal’s body was lifted up by a soul which drove it and made it run with much less effort than Milo’s.’ (*Selected works / Galen*, ed. by P. N. Singer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 50)

<sup>210</sup> Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, p. II 9.

<sup>211</sup> [...] *tout le secret des armes ne consiste qu’en deux choses, à donner, et à ne point recevoir [...]* (Molière, *Le bourgeois gentilhomme: comédie-ballet faite à Chambord pour le divertissement du Roi*, 1671, in Molière, *Oeuvres de Molière* (Paris, Hachette 1873–1900), Act II, Scene II, spoken by the *maître d’armes*).

and injuring or killing only if necessary.<sup>213</sup> It is not about winning; it is about not losing, a distinction with a difference. It is difficult, therefore, to characterize *la verdadera destreza* as a species of fencing, and it is not clear that our authors do so either.

At this point one might ask how we would define fencing. To this we might answer that, if it is the case that our authors avoided the period term for fencing, *esgrima*,<sup>214</sup> and if it is the case that modern fencing does not derive from *la verdadera destreza*, because the practice of the latter did not result in a still-living tradition, then how we would define fencing is irrelevant. To consider *la verdadera destreza* a systematic approach to self-defence, informed by reason and ethics, is to stay close to what the texts say, unless we have missed some crucial texts, or else misunderstood them, and our formulation is open to refinement. Our intent is to avoid projecting, even inadvertently, a modern understanding of fencing, however construed, backwards into history, and so run the risk of distorting or obscuring how *la verdadera destreza* was viewed in period by those who promoted it, but rather to project ourselves backwards into history (if only in the historical imagination) in an attempt to discover and explore the period point of view, remaining sensitive to it, as a way of informing and bettering our understanding.<sup>215</sup>

<sup>212</sup> The ability to offend without being offended is also necessary for ‘our *diestro*’ (Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, p. II 313; cf. 231–232), something which the way of working of the nations cannot guarantee, because they can always be struck when striking, ‘which is that which is not permitted in good *destreza*, since defence must always be implicated in offence’ (Rada, *Nobleza de la espada*, 1705, pp. II 313–314). D’Alessandro believed that the Spanish response, described above, to a swordsman who lunged would not succeed so easily against the Neapolitan *botta dritta*, which inevitably succeeded (D’Alessandro, *Opera di d. Giuseppe D’Alessandro*, 1723, p. 22); Ettenhard and Rada had this *botta irreparabile* in mind when they crafted their responses. Nevertheless, he acknowledged the incredible folly (*grossa pazzia*) of not recognizing the possibility of being struck while striking when discussing how a Neapolitan should face a Spaniard: [...] *il vero colpo è quello, che si dà in tempo sicure di risposte, e libero d’ogni altra offesa* (D’Alessandro, *Opera di d. Giuseppe D’Alessandro*, 1723, p. 22).

<sup>213</sup> “[...] *destreza* does not require offending; rather it is for the reason of defence consistent with Christian principles, its principal object being defence” (Ettenhard, *Diestro italiano*, 1697, 128).

<sup>214</sup> A priest who reviewed Ettenhard’s last treatise, confessing the topic to be outside his area of expertise, wrote: ‘I have heard many say they do not work at the science of fencing (*la ciencia de la esgrima*) because it is of such quality that its study is of no use as soon as needed’ (Ettenhard, *Diestro italiano*, 1697, p. vii). The source and substance of the assertion hardly sustain an opposing argument.

<sup>215</sup> In 1670 Pallavicini (Pallavicini, *La scherma illustrate*, 1670, p. 29) had written: “[...] the Spanish, French, Italian play, or of any other nation, all descend from the Roman school, which is the true school of fencing ...”. Five years later Mendoza wrote: “Let the eyes be turned back to antiquity and it will be found that Rome took from Spain not only the shape and size of the sword, but also the way of wielding it” (Mendoza, *Resumen de la verdadera destreza*, 1675, pp. ii, To the Reader ; cf. Ettenhard, *Compendio de los fundamentos*, 1675, p. iii, Proem). (The reference is to the *gladius hispaniensis*, or sometimes *gladius hispanus*). Santos de la Paz points out that what we have translated

## IV.2. Traditional Measures

The *vara* is a traditional Spanish unit of measure. It represented the distance from elbow to elbow when the arms were crossed across the chest, the outstretched middle finger of one hand touching the outstretched middle finger of the other. Like the other traditional measures of Spain and Italy, it varied from place to place, but for much of Spain, including Castille, it was equivalent to 0.835905 meters.<sup>216</sup>

The *vara* was divided into three *pies* (feet), four *palmos* (spans), or forty-eight *dedos* (fingers). A foot was 16 *dedos*, or four *palmas* (palms) of four fingers each; Rada refers to this as a geometrical foot (*pie geométrico*).<sup>217</sup> The *palmo* (span) was also referred to as a *cuarta* (fourth). The *pulgada* (inch) was the twelfth part of a foot.

A third of a *vara* is  $0.835905/3.0$  or 0.278635 meters.

The international foot (or the US customary and imperial foot), is 0.3048 meters, or one third of a yard (0.9144 meters), which is rather under a meter, and rather over a *vara*. It consists of 12 inches. Therefore, the geometric foot is  $0.278635/0.3048 * 12 = 10.96988188976378 \approx 11$  inches.

When translating Spanish texts which use the traditional units of measurement, it is convenient to be able to translate *pie* as “foot”. However, those accustomed to US customary or imperial measures need to bear in mind that the foot used in our texts is somewhat shorter than the customary foot, while those accustomed to the metric system can convert to measures more familiar to them using the formulas given above.

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as “wielding it” is expressed in the original by *esgrimirla* (Santos de la Paz, *Ilustración de la destreza indiana*, 1712, p. 12). However, *esgrimir* has the meaning of wielding and managing the sword and other weapons (Dictionary of the Spanish Royal Academy, ad. loc.). To suppose that Mendoza meant *esgrima* as it was commonly understood in period, not to mention fencing as it is generally understood today, is, we believe, to push the point. The following passage, illustrating the use of the verb in context, meaning “to wield weapons”, comes from a contemporary description of warfare. *Mas como este excelente caballero no intermitiese sus marchas, acelerando sus tropas, llegó al país á tiempo que se empezaban á esgrimir las armas y arrojarse y disparar vara y flecha de un ejército de los indios del país al otro, y á este tiempo tuvo D. Pedro de Alvarado noticia desta nueva guerra cuando se hallaba más desembarazado y casi libre de la campaña de Atitlán* (Fuentes y Guzmán, *Historia de Guatemala*, 1690, p. II 71).

<sup>216</sup> *Equivalencias entre las pesas y medidas usadas antiguamente en las diversas provincias de España y las legales del sistema métrico-decimal* (Madrid: Empreñta de la Dirección General del Instituto Geográfico y Estadístico, 1886, p. 7).

<sup>217</sup> See Rada, *Crisol de la verdadera destreza*, 1695, p. 14, for the definition.

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