

Spanish Fencing Masters: An Overview

The below notes and this class are meant as a starting point for your Destreza studies, to give you familiarity with common terms and the biggest names. Whether you are taking this as a passing curiosity or the start to a new area of learning for you, I hope these notes are of use! Feel free to make your own copy of this and add/edit any additional sources you find of use.

Background Information

Historical Situation Summary

- Heading out of the Spanish “Golden Age” and into decline
 - Economic uncertainty with influx of silver from colonies combined with cost of wars.
- Complicated government situation
 - Catholic Monarchy ruling over the Iberian peninsula
 - Spanish Hapsbergs Philip II, Philip III, Philip IV
 - “Iberian Union” 1580-1640
 - Six separate Councils controlled the different territories held
- Colonial Territories
 - “New Spain” - North and South American lands
- “Spanish Netherlands” or Flanders
 - Held by the Spanish Hapsbergs but not added to the Spanish crown, 1556 to 1714
- Portuguese Restoration War
 - Starting 1640 leading to Portuguese independence in 1688 in the Treaty of Lisbon

The Spanish Inquisition

What is “Destreza”?

- La verdadera destreza de la espada, shorted to Destreza or LVD, was a fencing style for nobles popularized in the Spanish court in the mid to late 1500s that remained popular post-period. Focused on a combination of fighting and philosophy that was meant, in the words of the Diestros who taught it, to be elevated from the fighting style of the common people, Esgrima Comun. Based on a circular structure instead of linear.

Terminology and Concepts

- Diestro/Diestra/Diestre
 - One who practices Destreza
 - Historically only diestro
- Medio
 - Doing things at the right time in the right speed in the right place for the moment.
- Stance of the fencer
 - Upright, right angles, based in geometry
- Footwork
 - Circular instead of linear
- Sword movements
 - Atajo
 - Generals
 - Movement of conclusion

Period Masters

Carranza

- Full Name: Jeronimo Sanchez de Carranza
- Biography Summary:
 - Born 1539, died sometime around 1600
 - Sometime as an adult became a knight
 - Was Governor of Sanlucar de Barrameda and royal governor of Honduras between 1589 to 1594
 - Was Master of Arms to the royal court from 1594 until his death
- Text(s) of most importance: De la Filosofia de las Armas y de su Destreza y la Aggression y Defensa Cristiana ("On the Philosophy of Arms and its Skill, and Christian Offense and Defense") written 1569, pub 1582, revised 1612 by Pachecho
- Writings summary: Carranza is the originator of what we today call Destreza, the combination of philosophy and swordfighting separate from the "esgrima comun" of the common people. Through his position as Master of Arms, and the efforts of his students, this became the dominant sword style for the nobility on the Iberian peninsula.
- Source -
 - Spanish - original text:
<https://archive.org/details/DeLaFilosofiaDeLasArmasYDeSuDestrezaYLaAggressionYDefensaCristiana/mode/2up>

- Spanish - typed text:
<https://opus.uleth.ca/items/755a2344-c3dd-4bd1-a132-90a41edba0df>
- English: Not really a good translation at this time. Lois Spangler is working on one, slowly. There is an old translation of Dialogues 1 and 3, but it is not recommended by current scholars.

Pacheco

- Full Name: Luis Pacheco de Narváez
- Biography Summary:
 - Born in 1570 in Andalusia Spain, died around 1640
 - Student of Carranza
 - Became a Sargeant Major in the Canary Islands
 - Became Master at Arms to Philip IV in 1624
 - Wrote between 7 and 11 total treatises on Destreza
- Text(s) of most importance:
 - “Libro de las Grandezas de la Espada” (A Book on the Greatness of the Sword”) around 1600
 - “Compendio de la filosofia de las armas de Geronimo de Carranza” (Compendium On the Philosophy of Arms of Jeronimo de Carranza) around 1612, a reformatting of Carranza’s work.
 - “Las cien conclusiones de la destreza de las armas” (One Hundred Conclusions of the Skill at Arms), believed to be 1620s
 - “Modo facil y nueuo para examinar los maestros en la destreza de las armas, y entender sus cien conclusiones, ò formas de saber” (Easy and new ways to test the Masters in Destreza, and understanding the hundred conclusions or ways of knowing) 1658, instructions on how to test fencing masters in LVD
 - Nueva ciencia; y filosofia de la destreza de las armas, sv teorica, y practica. (New science and philosophy of the art of weapons, its theory and practice) published posthumously 1672
- Writings summary: Pachecho refined and further defined Destreza, continuing to establish Destreza as the main fencing style on the Iberian peninsula. He started as a student of Carranza, refining his methods, and then later grew to criticize his former teacher. Similar to Carranza, his writings include a lot of philosophy in addition to the fighting instructions.
- Sources
 - Spanish scan
 - “Nueva Ciencia”
<https://www.scribd.com/document/98583174/Nueva-Ciencia-y-Filosofia-Pacheco-de-Narvaez>

- “Modo facil”
https://www.bibliotecadigitaldeandalucia.es/catalogo/es/catalogo_imagenes/grupo.do?path=162209
- Spanish text
 - “Libro de las Grandezas de la Espada” transcription by Tim Rivera
 - <https://spanishsword.org/files/grandezas.tercera.parte.transcripcion.pdf>
- English
 - “Libro de las Grandezas de la Espada” translations by Tim Rivera
 - Part 1:
<https://spanishsword.org/files/grandezas.translation.first.part.pdf>
 - Part 3:
<https://spanishsword.org/files/grandezas.third.part.translation.pdf>

Godinho

- Full Name: Domingo Luis Godinho
- Biography Summary: We do not have a lot of information about his life, other than that he was Portuguese.
- Text(s) of most importance: “El Arte de Esgrima” (The Art of the Sword) written 1599 mostly in Spanish
- Writings summary: This text is primarily about the Esgrima Comun, or “Common School” of fighting that predates LVD. It contains information on single sword, sword and shield, sword and buckler, sword and dagger, sword and cloak, double swords, and the montante.
- Sources
 - Spanish:
 - Original folio online -
<https://permalinkbnd.bnportugal.gov.pt/records/item/88574-el-libro-llamado-arte-de-esgrima>
 - Typed version of text:
<https://ageaeditora.com/en/livros/arte-de-esgrima/>
 - English: Translation by Tim Rivera via Purpleheart Armory
https://www.woodenswords.com/Iberian_Swordplay_p/book-fl.ibe01.htm

Thibault

- Full Name: Gérard Thibault d'Anvers
- Biography Summary:

- Born in 1574 in Antwerp, in the Netherlands, then under Spanish crown rule, died around 1629
- Studied fencing as a child in Antwerp
- Became a wool merchant and was around Carranza's birthplace around 1605
- Started teaching his system around 1611ish, winning prizes and even demonstrating his system to the Prince of Nassau
- Started working with a team of engravers to write his book around 1622
- Text(s) of most importance: "Academie de l'Espée" ("Academy of the Sword") pub 1630 (credited as 1628 within the book)
- Writings summary: Thibault's system is highly mathematical and precise, with a unique grip. The book starts with an elaborate and exhaustive set of measurements by which to construct and consider the circle within which the fencer is fighting, including the length of sword they should be using and how to draw it. The book includes highly elaborate engravings illustrating every point of his process.
- Sources
 - French original scans:
 - KU Leuven - Libraries Special Collections:
https://repository.teneo.libis.be/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE6804696
 - Bibliothèque nationale de France:
<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1912344f.r=Girard%20thibault?rk=42918>
 - USA Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov/item/50042696/>
 - French text: I have not yet found one
 - English:
<https://www.amazon.com/Academy-Sword-Gerard-Thibault/dp/1904658849> Translation by John Michael Greer, 2006

Post-Period

Figueiredo

- Full Name: Diogo Gomes de Figueyredo/Figueiredo
- Biography Summary:
 - Born around 1600 in Portugal, d 1685
 - Was a General and commanded in battles in the Portuguese War of Restoration on the side of Portuguese independence
 - Served as fencing master for the new Crown of Portugal and tutored the then crown prince Theodoszio

- Text(s) of most importance:
 - Oplosophia e Verdadeira Destreza das Armas (Hoplosophy and the True Skill of Arms"), 1628, discussion of rapier and secondary weapons
 - Memorial Da Prattica do Montante ("Memorial of the Practice of the Montante"), 1651, discussion of Esgrima Antigua/comun and the Montante great sword
- Writings summary: Unlike other post-Carranza authors of Destreza works, Figueiredo also includes discussions of the Esgrima Comun, the fighting style of the "common people", which had mostly fallen out of favor by that time in more elevated circles. In addition to the standard discussions of the rapier, Figueiredo is a fantastic source for discussions of secondary weapons such as the dagger or cloak. He also has an entire book on the Montate, the Iberian great weapon.
- Source
 - English translation and Portuguese text "Memorial of the Practice of the Montante":
https://oakeshott.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Figueiredo_Montante_Translation_Myers_and_Hick_v2.pdf
 - Portuguese "Hoplosophy and the True Skill of Arms" currently out of stock -
<https://ageaeditora.com/en/livros/oplosophia-e-verdadeira-destreza-das-armas/>
 - English rough translation of "Oplosophia"
<https://www.storytrade.net/hema/destreza-sword-and-dagger-in-oplosophia/> Lois Spangler

Rada

- Full Name: Francisco Lórenz de Rada
- Biography Summary:
 - Born Oct 1660 Laredo, Spain, Died 1713 in Mexico
 - Started training in Destreza when he was 14
 - Served in the military as a Captain and was made Knight of the Order of Santiago in 1694
 - Became Governor of Veracruz, "New Spain" in 1695
 - In 1703 purchased the rights to the title Chief Chancellor and Perpetual Registrar of the Kingdoms of New Spain
 - In 1704 was created Marquis of Las Torres de Rada
- Text(s) of most importance: "Nobleza de la Espada", "Nobility of the Sword" Volume 1 is philosophy and mathematics, Volume 2 is definitions, Volume 3 is the practical fencing

- Writings summary: Rada's work provides a comprehensive overview of the works that came before, including covering material that Pacheho had entrusted his students to write that was not written. "Nobleza de la Espada" in particular has been described as the most detailed and comprehensive treatises of Destreza. Of particular interest in our game is his development of the atajo inferior, or gaining atajo from underneath the opponent's blade.
- Source
 - Spanish scan of original:
<http://www.destreza.ca/biblio/1705%20Rada%20Nobleza%20de%20la%200Espada.pdf>
 - English: Ongoing translation project:
<https://destreza-fencing.com/resources>

Modern Resources:

- Introductory Book: "From the Page to the Practice" by Puck Curtis and Mary Dill-Curtis
 - Puck is a Professional Sword Guy. Mary is a historical linguist. This primer is a fantastic English starting place for a beginning diestro, covering basic history of Destreza along with the basics of the various forms.
 - <https://www.freelanceacademypress.com/frompagetopractice.aspx>
- Destreza in the SCA Facebook Group:
 - While listed as an SCA resource, this group is also referenced by Destreza scholars throughout the community, and is a fantastic place to discuss LVD at any level.
 - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/356001691175362>
- Destreza Discord
 - A fantastic place to discuss individual Diestros in history, as well as other topics such as philosophy, technique, etc.
 - This community is more advanced in their practice and discussions.
 - <https://discord.gg/CWSVfnST>
- Youtube
 - I do not have a particular page to suggest at this time, as video does not work the best for me in terms of learning. However there are a number of Destreza practitioners who put their videos on Youtube, in English and Spanish. Feel free to fill in what ones work for you in the space below, to keep your sources in one place.

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Teacher: Siobhán an Einigh of Connacht, Honored Filidh
Contact: siobhan.an.einigh@gmail.com

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Online version of notes



If QR code isn't working, use

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1k5Eaf3HoyRuM2noPhKYwn0Qjpu70ULpT7KiRnkZyeu0/e/dit?usp=sharing>