

The Bolognese Tradition: Ancient Tradition or Modern Myth?

Rob Runacres,
Winchester University

Abstract – This article discusses the modern interpretation that Bologna produced a distinctive regional martial tradition, based on the existence of similar treatises. It examines the assumption that a series of fencing masters formed a distinct lineage and that their martial practices formed a tradition separate to martial forms outside of Bologna. As a case study, it also considers the ‘Viridario’ of Giovanni Filoteo Achillini, a poem that contains instructions on the use of sword and buckler, written in 1504 and asks why this apparently unknown treatise was not used by its author to promote a Bolognese tradition.

Keywords – Bolognese, Dardi, Bologna, Marozzo, Manciolino, Dall’Agocchie, Viggiani, Achillini, Tradition

I. INTRODUCTION

For the traveller in early modern Italy, Bologna was a must see. In his memoirs first published in 1595, the French traveller Jacques de Villamont expressed his excitement at visiting ‘because there is a celebrated and famous university in all kinds of studies and honest exercise, for gentlemen and other people, be it to address them to pick a horse well, or to use weapons ...’.¹ Boasting the oldest university in Europe, by the fifteenth century Bologna also had the largest in Italy and, by the early sixteenth, had far more professors of law and medicine than other universities in northern Europe, thereby creating a draw for foreign students.² Yet, as de Villamont indicated, there were opportunities for other study in the city: Bologna had a long-standing reputation for teaching the use of arms, and several fencing masters in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries even produced written treatises on their art. Today, commonalities in these treatises coupled with the shared birthplace of the authors has, in the modern historical fencing community, led to the theory of a ‘Bolognese tradition’, a distinct martial form that was centred in Bologna and which reached its peak in the sixteenth century. Much of this theory has been formed by members of the historical martial arts community who have worked on interpretations of the physical mechanics as well as the pedagogy of the treatises.

Central to the idea of a Bolognese tradition are five sixteenth century texts which have been interpreted as sharing the same broad pedagogy and methodology, for example the

¹ Villamont, *Les Voyages du Seigneur de Villamont*, p. 26.

² Grendler, ‘The University of Bologna, the city, and the papacy’, p. 476.

description of *assalti*, a choreographed form either performed alone or with a partner in order to practice a set of techniques.³ Key to the pedagogy is the use of mnemonic terminology for guards, such as *coda lunga e stretta* and *porta di ferro e larga*. These reflect a heritage from the fifteenth century or earlier, with authors such as Filippo Vadi and Fiore de'i Liberi using guard names such as *posta di donna*, *tutta porta di ferro* and *posta di dente di cinghiale*.⁴ In three of these five books, the author identifies themselves as Bolognese: *Opera Nova* by Antonio Manciolino, printed in 1531; *Opera Nova* or *Arte dell'Armi* by Achille Marozzo, first printed in 1536, and *Dell'Arte di Scrima Libri Tre* by Giovanni dall'Agocchie, printed in 1572.⁵ The two other texts, the Classense Manuscripts 345 and 346, are anonymous and do not refer to Bologna, but due to their similarity to the forementioned authors have already been termed the 'Anonimo Bolonese' by historical fencers and translators.⁶ Angelo Viggiani dal Montone's *Lo Schermo*, written in 1551, is usually added to this group of texts, but his treatise differs in that the majority of the text is a philosophical work on the worth of arms.⁷ The remainder of Viggiani's text concentrates on fencing methodology and attempts to simplify fencing terminology by using a pedagogy different to mnemonic terminology, calling the latter's guard names 'bizarre' and 'of the common school'.⁸

This article examines the historiography of the Bolognese tradition and asks when and how it was defined. Its aim is not to explode a myth or to deny that traditions existed, but it does argue that, in certain instances, assumptions have been made that have created a modern view of a fencing tradition that may not have been recognised by contemporaries. Following a review of an assumed Bolognese lineage and the difficulties in grouping fencing terminology, a case study is made of the 'Viridario' by Bolognese poet Giovanni Filoteo Achillini, a long poem completed in 1504 which contains lessons on fencing with the sword and buckler.

II. THE DARDI TRADITION

Bologna as a city can be viewed through various lenses: as a city with defined limits or with a hinterland of influence; as a part of the wider Papal States or as the destination for

³ For example, the detailed *assalti* with sword and buckler in book one of Marozzo's *Opera Nova*, 4v-15v.

⁴ Vadi, *De Arte Gladiatoria Dimicandi*; Fiore de'i Liberi, *Fior di Battaglia*.

⁵ Manciolino, *Opera Nova*; dall'Agocchie, *Dell'Arte Di Scrimia Libri Tre*. Tom Leoni has suggested that Manciolino's text is a later edition to a work from 1523, which would firmly place Manciolino as the earliest Italian master in print, beating Marozzo to the press by thirteen years; Leoni, *The Complete Renaissance Swordsman*, p. 11.

⁶ Manoscritti 345-346, Ravenna.

⁷ Viggiani dal Montone, *Lo Schermo*.

⁸ Viggiani, *Lo Schermo*, p. 60.

travellers and students. In the first half of the sixteenth century, Bologna underwent considerable changes; Papal influence had grown throughout the fifteenth century and was asserted in 1512 when the ruling Bentivoglio family was finally ejected by the forces of Pope Julius II. The Papacy had a complicated relationship with Bologna up to and beyond this date, and how far Popes exerted direct authority over the wishes of the Bolognese Senate has been a subject of much debate, but Bologna was certainly immensely valuable given its position on major trade routes and at the northern frontier of the Papal States.⁹ In addition to Papal authority was the old nobility and these families had a network of power throughout north and central Italy. While active in civic life, their power base was often rural.¹⁰ Bologna may have been the centre for the nobility and would-be patrons of fencing masters, but that nobility was not parochial or static. In addition to a widely spread and deeply connected nobility was a large student population. There were some 1500-2000 in residence annually between 1501 and 1550, with a large proportion of them being German.¹¹ Bologna was also remarkable for its home-grown painters and sculptors who influenced others across Italy and beyond; it also attracted Italian artists such as Michaelangelo as well as those from outside of the peninsula such as Albrecht Dürer and Diego Velázquez.¹² Contemporary fencers from Bologna were unlikely to have been unaffected by these factors, yet when considering a fencing tradition, there has to date been little published study placing fencing within the broader context. Instead, the tradition has been in part formed around an assumed lineage from the fencer Lippo di Bartolomeo Dardi.

Lippo di Bartolomeo Dardi was a fencing master who ran a fencing *salle* in Bologna from c.1413; he also obtained a reader's chair in Geometry at the University of Bologna, having reasoned that geometry 'conforms to the art of fencing', and is recorded as remaining at the university until 1463.¹³ As we shall see, modern historians and historical fencers have suggested that Dardi was the instructor of Guido Antonio di Luca, who in turn went on to teach Achille Marozzo, one of the authors previously mentioned. This lineage, perceived similarities between the texts, and the identification of known authors as Bolognese have therefore been viewed and reconstructed as a direct tradition or school,

⁹ For a brief summary of the debate see Lines, 'Papal Power and University Control in Early Modern Italy', pp. 665-67.

¹⁰ Rose, *A Renaissance of Violence*, p. 9.

¹¹ Grendler, 'The University of Bologna, the city, and the papacy', pp. 476-7.

¹² For Michelangelo see Martha Dunkelman, 'What Michelangelo Learned in Bologna', pp. 107-35; For Dürer, see Carty, 'Albrecht Dürer's Adoration of the Trinity: A Reinterpretation', p. 151; for Velázquez, see Pons, 'A letter of introduction for Velázquez in Bologna', pp. 616-19. Velázquez is late for the period covered here but reflects Bologna's ongoing draw for artists.

¹³ Dallari, *I Rotuli dei Lettori Legisti e Artisti dello Studio Bolognese dal 1384 - 1799*, pp. 19-65.

often called the ‘Dardi tradition’, as well as the Dardi or Bolognese ‘school’, though what constitutes a tradition or indeed a ‘school’ has proved difficult to pin down.¹⁴

A Dardi lineage was first proposed in the early twentieth century, with the historian Emilio Orioli and the antiquarian and fencing writer Jacopo Gelli linking Dardi to di Luca, whom Achille Marozzo stated was his master. Emilio Orioli appears to have first put this theory forward in an article for the newspaper *il Resto del Carlino* in 1901.¹⁵ In it he assumed Dardi probably taught Luca on the basis that Luca was in his twenties when Dardi was teaching and so was of the right age and in the right place. Jacopo Gelli took this further in 1906, stating that Luca was a pupil of Dardi, and that Luca inherited Dardi’s school when the latter died in 1464.¹⁶

It was also Orioli and Gelli who seem to have first linked the other masters of Bologna to Marozzo, with Gelli identifying Dall’Agocchie, Viggiani, and the German Joachim Meyer as ‘pupils’ of Marozzo.¹⁷ Gelli even went as far as stating that Meyer’s treatise of 1570 was a translation of Marozzo; while this is clearly wrong, Meyer’s fightbook of 1561 does contain several illustrations that follow Marozzo’s own and there may be influence.¹⁸ Neither Orioli nor Gelli provided evidence for a direct link between the masters: their assumptions were based on the commonality of language in most of the texts and the identification in those texts of the authors being Bolognese. For Gelli in particular, evidence was never allowed to get in the way of a good theory: he also had an axe to grind against the English fencer and antiquarian Egerton Castle, who suggested that the treatises of Marozzo and Manciolino contained tricks rather than a system.¹⁹ Castle was generally dismissive of Manciolino and Marozzo, saying they were typical of the period where ‘it seems impossible to discern a general leading principle or settled method in the works of that period’.²⁰ Castle did, however, suggest a Bolognese school existed: ‘Towards the year 1530... a kind of privileged association undoubtedly existed, which had its headquarters in Bologna, and Achille Marozzo for chief’.²¹ Gelli’s book *L’Arte dell’armi in Italia* was in many ways a furious attack on Castle, and to a lesser extent the French fencer Merignac, and throughout Gelli sought to assert Marozzo as the beginning of a new written

¹⁴ Swanger, *A Treatise on the Science of Arms, with a Philosophical Dialogue, by Camillo Agrippa: An Annotated Translation*.

¹⁵ Orioli, ‘La Scherma a Bologna’, *Resto del Carlino*, p. 1. Notably, this is a newspaper centred on Bologna.

¹⁶ Gelli, *L’Arte dell’armi in Italia*, p. 15.

¹⁷ Gelli, *L’Arte dell’armi in Italia*, p. 46. Gelli may have been echoing an assumption made by Luis Pacheco de Narvaez. See Olivier Dupuis, ‘A new manuscript of Joachim Meyer (1561)’, p. 8.

¹⁸ Dupuis, ‘A new manuscript of Joachim Meyer (1561)’, p. 8.

¹⁹ Castle, *Schools and Masters of Fencing: From the Middle Ages to the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 34-35.

²⁰ Castle, *Schools and Masters of Fencing*, p. 34.

²¹ Castle, *Schools and Masters of Fencing*, p. 33.

revolution in fencing (after pre-existing authors such as Vadi and Fiore), with Italians and in particular the Bolognese leading the way. Both Orioli and Gelli were equally incensed that the French fencer Mérignac in his *Histoire de l'escrime* suggested that the Italians were simply disciples of the Spanish who followed Charles V into Italy.²² Orioli refuted this, explaining 'about a century before the Spaniards came to Italy with Charles V already Lippo Dardi had composed a book on this subject'.²³ It is perhaps ironic that, in a survey of foreign doctors reading liberal arts published in 1623 by Giovanni Alidosi, Lippo Dardi is identified as Spanish.²⁴ This in no way validates Merignac's sweeping assertion, but certainly does call into question the approach to fight books by such fencing authors as Castle, Mérignac, and Gelli and the legacy they left to later writers researching fencing. For Gelli in particular, it seemed important to link masters into what he called a school to prove that a systematic and linked approach existed in Bologna as well as elsewhere in Italy, goaded as he was by others following Whig teleology.

III. MODERN INTERPRETATIONS

Modern published research on sixteenth century fencing in Bologna has predominantly consisted of translations of the five texts already mentioned. Antonio Manciolino's *Opera Nova* and book three of Angelo Viggiani's *Lo Schermo* have been translated both by Jherek Swanger and by Tom Leoni.²⁵ Swanger has also translated Marozzo's *Opera Nova* with the exception of part of book five which dealt with legal aspects of the duel, as well as *Dell'Arte di Scrima Libri Tre* by Giovanni dall'Agocchie.²⁶ Leoni has to date translated book one of Marozzo's treatise and has stated his intention to publish translations of the other books in separate volumes.²⁷ Stephen Fratus has published a translation of the Classense Manuscripts 345 and 346.²⁸ These authors' primary concern has been in providing translations of fencing techniques. Swanger is candid in admitting that his omission of much of book five is due to his lack of background in duelling laws. Swanger is also frank

²² Mérignac, *Histoire de l'escrime dans tous les temps et dans tous les pays*, p. 487.

²³ Orioli, "La Scherma a Bologna", p. 1.

²⁴ Alidosi, *Li dottori forestieri, che in Bologna hanno letto teologia, filosofia, medicina, & arti liberali, con li rettori dello studio da gli anni*, p. 50. 'Lippo Dardi' does not appear to be an Italian name, so if he was Spanish, Dardi may have been naturalised. Umberto Dallari records him as 'Lippus Dardi', for example Dallari, *I Rotuli dei lettori legisti*, p. 40.

²⁵ Swanger, *How to Fight and Defend with Arms of Every Kind, by Antonio Manciolino*; Tom Leoni, *The Complete Renaissance Swordsman*; Swanger, *The Fencing Method of Angelo Viggiani Lo Schermo, Part III*; Tom Leoni, *Viggiani: Lo Schermo. Book III, English Translation with Original instructions*.

²⁶ Swanger, *The Duel, or the Flower of Arms for Single Combat, Both Offensive and Defensive, by Achille Marozzo*; Swanger, *The Art of Defence: on Fencing, the Joust, and Battle Formation, by Giovanni dall'Agocchie*.

²⁷ Leoni, *Marozzo Book 1*.

²⁸ Fratus, *With malice and Cunning. Anonymous 16th Century Manuscript on Bolognese Swordsmanship*.

in his explanation for only translating book three of Viggiani's work, stating that his primary interest lies in the fencing described there. In Leoni's translation, books one and two are omitted on the basis that they consist of 'tedious banter' between two characters whose dialogue is 'unenlightening in the sense that it is not expository'.²⁹

While these modern translators have ascribed the treatises to a Bolognese tradition, little contextual research has been published on how this tradition or school is defined, outside of interpreted fencing techniques. How fencers interacted to share and form fencing customs or a tradition remains unknown. Research to date does not appear to have identified any form of civic fencing guilds to compare with the *Marxbrüder* guild centred in Frankfurt or the *Hallebardiers* in Bruges.³⁰ There is, in a sense, no civic influence in the treatises other than Bologna's name. How a Bolognese tradition differs from fencing styles outside the city has not been explicitly defined, and how far cultural or environmental influences shaped any martial tradition has yet to be thoroughly explored.

Modern fencers and translators have followed Orioli and Gelli to a considerable degree. In his translation of dall'Agocchie, W. Jherek Swanger identifies the 'Dardi tradition' as including Marozzo, Manciolino, the anonymous author of the Manuscripts Classense 345 and 346, and dall'Agocchie, while Angelo Viggiani is 'peripheral but relevant'.³¹ Ken Mondschein concurs, adding Mercurio Spetoli of Fermo's work of 1577, and emphasising the school's 'common pedagogical and tactical model, with a common vocabulary and, one would assume, orthopraxy for guards and various other actions'.³² Greg Mele uses the term 'Dardi School', asserting it 'flourished and passed on to later generations'.³³ Tom Leoni discusses a genealogy of Bolognese fencers, including the Cavalcabo 'dynasty, which spread beyond Italy and into France well into the seventeenth century'.³⁴ However, Leoni is very cautious that a unified tradition existed, though he does highlight that most authors identify themselves as Bolognese.

Leoni is not alone in his caution: Alessandro Battistini and Niki Corradetti have misgivings that a coherent tradition existed and highlight that no evidence exists that Dardi taught Luca, who was in turn the teacher of Marozzo.³⁵ Others have been more contradictory: Stephen Fratus, in his translation of the anonymous Classense 345 and 346,

²⁹ Leoni, *Viggiani: Lo Schermo*, p. viii.

³⁰ Thlusty, *The Martial Ethic in Early Modern Germany* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 214; Gevaert and van Noort, 'Evolution of Martial Tradition in the Low Countries: Fencing Guilds and Treatises', p. 378.

³¹ *Notes, further reading, and acknowledgement* in Swanger, *The Art of Defence*.

³² Mondschein, 'The Italian Schools of Fencing: Art, Science, and Pedagogy', p. 303.

³³ Mele, 'Fighting Arts of the Renaissance - Bologna: City of Swordsmen', pp. 249-50.

³⁴ Leoni, *The Complete Renaissance Swordsman*, p. 10.

³⁵ Battistini and Corradetti, 'Income and working time of a Fencing Master in Bologna in the 15th and early 16th century', p. 154.

admits that ‘it is not entirely clear’ whether there was a Bolognese tradition, but later states that ‘In the modern study of historical European martial arts, we can clearly speak of a Bolognese school based on common terminology, similar methods and a common underlying theory’.³⁶ This may be challenged, even by those who are comfortable using the term ‘school’; Swanger, in his translation of Marozzo’s *Opera Nova*, reconsiders his thoughts on a Bolognese school; ‘For all we know there could have been fencing instructors in Bologna with styles based on wholly different frameworks’ and goes on to develop this by writing:

While on the whole stylistically similar, terminology and even the forms of guards are not always wholly interchangeable. The same guard may be called by different names by different authors, while conversely, two guards called the same name may actually be formed differently.³⁷

Swanger here gives a clear warning when making interpretations: do not assume that a naming convention is consistent and therefore, do not apply said convention without due care. Taking this further, there are challenges when identifying what is ‘canon’ Bolognese terminology and what is excluded as ‘foreign’.

Difficulties arise when identifying what terminology is specifically ‘Bolognese’ as opposed to that more widely used. We have seen that Viggiani described such terms as ‘common’. The Florentine, Francesco Altoni, who taught at the court of Cosimo I de’ Medici, attempted to simplify fencing terminology and identified *porta di ferro*, *imbrochate* and *guarda cinghiara* as common or ‘vulgar’ terms.³⁸ Despite his simplifications, Altoni continued to use *porta di ferro* in his text.³⁹ While Altoni’s work may be assumed to be separate to fencing writers from Bologna, without detailed comparative studies, any understanding that terminology is shared or distinct is difficult to make. More general texts do not assist. One of the earliest attempts at creating an encyclopaedia, the *Tipocosmia* of Alessandro Citolini, published in 1561, listed a range of fencing guards:

... saranno le guardie, è lor maniere, cio é guardia di entrare in largo passo, guardia di entrare in non largo passo, guardia alta, guardia bassa, guardia di testa, di faccia, di coda longa, ed alta, di coda lunga, è stretta, di coda lunga, è larga, di coda longa e distesa, di porta di ferro alta, di porta di ferro stretta, di porta di ferro larga, di cinghiara porta di ferro,

³⁶ Fratus, *With malice and Cunning*, p. 8.

³⁷ ‘History and Context’ in Swanger, *The Duel*, p. 14. Swanger repeats this statement in his translation of Manciolino’s *Opera Nova*: Swanger, *How to fight and Defenc with Arms of Every Kind*, p. 9.

³⁸ As seen above, Viggiani writes ‘dalle commune scuola’ (p. 60), whereas Altoni (see below) describes such guards are so called ‘vulgaramente’ (p. 9v); whether the two terms were used interchangeably or had differing emphasis requires further research.

³⁹ Altoni, *Monomachia*, 9v for *porta di ferro*; 17r for *imbrochate*; 59r for *guarda cinghiara*.

di cinghiara porta di ferro alta, di cinghiara porta il ferro stretta, di cinghiara porta di ferro larga, di becca posa, di becca cesa, di fianco ,di croce.⁴⁰

Taken as a whole the guards conform to Achille Marozzo's text, but Marozzo is not credited: whether Marozzo's conventions had become the standard or reflected the standard in nomenclature is open to interpretation. These guard names, however, are individually used by other authors. In addition to *porta di ferro*, *imbrochate* and *guarda cinghiara*, Altoni also uses *guardia bassa* and *guardia alta*, usually adding *destra* or *sinistra*.⁴¹ Giacomo di Grassi of Modena also used *guardia bassa* and *guardia alta* in his treatise of 1570. Tommaso Garzoni's encyclopaedic *La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo*, published in 1586, included a section on fencing and cited Marozzo and Di Grassi as authorities, calling Di Grassi 'Iacomo Modenese'; Garzoni concentrated on Marozzo, but is unclear whether the guards are Marozzo's own or shared with Di Grassi.⁴²

Mnemonic terminology can be found scattered across other works. The Roman playwright Giovanni Briccio, for example, in *Avisi Necessarii Per difendersi dall'Inimico in molti modi* uses the guard *coda lunga*.⁴³ Luis Pacheco de Narvaez mentions *Puerta de hierro* in *Libro de las grandezas de la espada* in 1600 as a vulgar posture and again in *Engaño y desengaño de los errores que se han querido introducir en la destreza de las armas* in 1635.⁴⁴ William Cavendish, the 1st Duke of Newcastle, mentions *coda lunga* as a Spanish guard in *The Truth of the Sword* in c. 1650.⁴⁵ As with Citolini and Garzoni, these terms are not identified as specifically Bolognese. Terminology also appeared in language dictionaries. Published in 1629, Guglielmo Alessandro de Novelieri Clavelli's *Nomenclatura italiana, francese e spagnuola* listed the Italian mnemonic guard names and their French and Spanish equivalents in a section entitled *La Scherma e i suoi termini*.⁴⁶ James Howell reprinted much of Clavelli's work as part of his *Lexicon Tetraglotton* in 1660, without troubling to mention the Italian as the original author and added English to the other three languages.⁴⁷ Swanger's warning on naming conventions appears to hold true. There is no clear indication as to what could be considered definitively Bolognese as opposed to terminology that overlapped between

⁴⁰ Citolini, *La Tipocosmia*, p. 456.

⁴¹ Altoni, *Monomachia*, 10v.

⁴² Garzoni, *La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo*, p. 707.

⁴³ Briccio, *Avisi Necessarii Per difendersi dall'Inimico in molti modi*, p. 13.

⁴⁴ Pacheco, *Libro de las grandezas de la espada*, 89r ; Pacheco, *Engaño y desengaño de los errores que se han querido introducir en la destreza de las armas*, pp. 178 and 183.

⁴⁵ Cavendish, *The Truth of the Sword*, p. 15.

⁴⁶ Clavelli, *Nomenclatura italiana, francese e spagnuola*.

⁴⁷ Howell, *Lexicon Tetraglotton, an English-French-Italian-Spanish Dictionary*.

individual masters. By the time of Clavelli's language dictionary, if not before, this nomenclature could be considered a general fencing terminology.

IV. THE BOLOGNESE CONNECTION

If the naming conventions may be challenged in detail, what then about the Bolognese connection between the authors? As already seen, the authors identified themselves as from Bologna, usually on the title page. This is not uncommon and other Italian writers on fencing associate themselves with a place of origin, such as Camillo Agrippa and Giovanni Antonio Lovino of Milan.⁴⁸ For Bolognese authors this is probably reflective of a wider trend of writers from Bologna expressing civic pride, as exemplified by Pompeo Vizani, Cherubino Ghirardacci, and Leandro Alberti, each of whom produced histories of Bologna in the sixteenth century and identified themselves as 'Bolognese'.⁴⁹ The fencing writers themselves do not otherwise expand on their Bolognese origins, nor do they refer to each other. Marozzo, for example, gives praise to his teacher, Guido Antonio di Luca, but there is no mention of Dardi, as discussed above, nor does he allude to any affiliation with other masters from Bologna.⁵⁰

The Classense Manuscripts 345 and 346 make no mention of Bologna and were found in Ravenna: Marco Rubboli and Luca Cesari have speculated that Guido Antonio di Luca was the author and while this theory has not met with wide agreement, the manuscripts have still been termed the 'Anonimo Bolognese' within the historical fencing community.⁵¹ Arguably, this term is counterproductive as by assuming the author is Bolognese, it limits the idea of a tradition having influence outside the city, or indeed of influences coming in.

Contemporary accounts of Bolognese fencers generally focus on the individuals rather than their place of origin: even where accounts do mention Bologna, they do not discuss any commonality in style. Michel de Montaigne describes a conversation with Silvio Piccolomini, a renowned soldier in the service of Cosimo de Medici: 'The seigneur Piccolomini takes very little account of the manner of fencing of the most famous Italian masters, such as the Venetians, the Bolognese, the Patinostrato and others'.⁵² The fencer Torquato d'Alessandri in 1609 mentions Oratio, Cesare Cavalcabo, and Camillo Palladini, 'called the Bolognese'.⁵³ Neither Piccolomini nor d'Alessandri give any indication of a

⁴⁸ Lovino, *Modo di cacciare mano all spada*.

⁴⁹ Vizani, *Di Pompeo Vizani gentil'huomo bolognese Diece libri delle historie della sua patria*; Cherubino Ghirardacci, *Della historia di Bologna*; Leandro Alberti, *Historie di Bologna*.

⁵⁰ Achille Marozzo, *Opera Nova*, ii.

⁵¹ Swanger, 'Forward' in Fratus, *With Malice and Cunning*, pp. 2-3.

⁵² Montaigne, *Oeuvres de Michel de Montaigne*, p. 734.

⁵³ D'Alessandri, *Il Cavalier Compito*, p. 107.

tradition, though both groups fence together as Bolognese. How far this can be seen as indicative of anything more than a grouping is open to question.

Other contemporaries ignore Bologna. For example, Marozzo and Manciolino, along with the Roman Camillo Agrippa, are included in *La Libreria del Doni* in 1550 by the Florentine man of letters and bibliographer Anton Francesco Doni.⁵⁴ This is significant as the *Libreria* was the first Italian bibliography of Italian contemporary authors and classics. Manciolino (recorded as Mazzolini) and Agrippa are recorded simply as having written on fencing, but Marozzo is praised as ‘very excellent’ and that he ‘deserves much praise’ for his book. In 1577, Doni was more critical of Marozzo, but he at least is retained: Agrippa and Manciolino were dropped from the bibliography.⁵⁵

Achille Marozzo receives the most attention elsewhere: Thomasso Garzoni’s *La Piazza Universale Di Tutte le Professioni* goes into some detail about Marozzo’s system as well as that of Giacomo Di Grassi of Modena, but does not mention Bologna; Garzoni wanted to concentrate on the individual, not the place.⁵⁶ George Buck, writing an appendix to John Stow’s *Annals or a general Chronicle of England* in 1615 also praises Marozzo and Manciolino, along with Iacomo Modenese and George Silver for their Science of Defence, but again Bologna is not mentioned.⁵⁷ Fencers themselves appear to have concentrated on the individual rather than any commonality: the Spaniard Jerónimo Sánchez de Carranza mentions Marozzo in his fencing manual of 1569 and Luis Pacheco de Narvaez comments unfavourably on Marozzo and dall’Agocchie among others in a treatise of 1635.⁵⁸ The Italian Giuseppe Pallavicini in 1670 lists Marozzo and Dall’Agocchie among famous masters, while Francesco Marcelli includes Marozzo and Viggiani in his text of 1686.⁵⁹ While each of these are named as Bolognese, other masters have their cities cited and there is no sense of a common school or tradition according to location.

⁵⁴ Doni, *La libreria del Doni fiorentino*.

⁵⁵ Doni, *La libreria del Doni*.

⁵⁶ Garzoni, *La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo*, p. 707.

⁵⁷ Buck, ‘The Third Universitie of England’ in Stow, *Annals or a general Chronicle of England*, p. 985. The appendix appeared again in 1631, with the same references, p.1084.

⁵⁸ Carranza, *De la Filosofia de las Armas y de su Destreça y la Aggression y Defensa Cristiana*, 125 ; Pacheco, ‘Al Letor’, *Engaño y desengaño de los errores que se han querido introducir en la destreça de las armas* (1635), iii.

⁵⁹ Pallavicini, *La Scherma Illustra*, p. 10; Marcelli, *Regole Della Scherma*, p. 11.

V. ACHILLINI'S 'VIRIDARIO'

The complexities in identifying a Bolognese tradition are exemplified by Giovanni Filoteo Achillini's 'Viridario', published in 1513 but completed in 1504.⁶⁰ Filoteo Achillini was a Bolognese poet and linguist and brother to the philosopher and anatomist Alessandro Achillini, who taught at the universities of Padua and Bologna. Filoteo was active in Bologna's cultural life, founding an academy, *Accademia del Viridario*, in 1511 and was appointed *gonfalonier* in 1527.⁶¹ Among his works, Achillini produced 'Fidele', written somewhat in the manner of Dante but, significant to an idea of a Bolognese tradition, accused Dante of plagiarising the Bolognese poet Guido Guinizelli. Through this accusation, Achillini sought to assert the primacy of the Bolognese language, something he developed in full in *Annotationi della volgar lingua* in 1536.⁶²

Superficially, 'Viridario' is a story written in verse, relating the adventures the sons of King Minos. In fact, the 'Viridario' covers many topics, including rendering much of the highly influential 'Foenix' by Pietro Tomai of Ravenna from Latin into vulgar Italian verse.⁶³ A major part of the 'Viridario', over forty stanzas in octave, is dedicated to the tuition of sword and buckler.⁶⁴ To place these lessons in the wider plot, Achillini relates how the sons of Minos are taught the secrets of fencing by the centaur, Chironne (Chiron) to prepare them for their battle against the giants. However, Achillini does not simply describe the protagonists at their studies, but instead recounts the lessons themselves: in other words, the author instructs the reader directly.

The text is certainly not nearly as extensive as later fight books from Bologna, or indeed as earlier Italian texts such as those by Fiore de'i Liberi or Filippo Vadi. However, the stanzas are concisely detailed, with descriptions of footwork and strikes. Most of verses relate a specific set of techniques, often with a counter technique. For example:

Item with the left foot pass to his right / From below upwards make a
ridoppio when passing / At his arm and quickly with the right foot / To
his left go therefore passing / Give a *falso* to the face not to the right
side. / The opposite and while they come passing / With the left foot

⁶⁰ Achillini, *Viridario*. At the end of *Viridario*, Achillini writes 'Nel Mille Cinque Cenco Quattro a tale / Libro dei fin la notte di NATALE'.

⁶¹ Giordano, 'Le Annotationi della volgar lingua di Giovanni Filoteo Achillini (1536)', p. 1.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁶³ Luciola, 'A "Phoenix" Nel "Viridario"'. *Fortuna Letteraria di un Trattato di Mnemotecnica*, p. 266.

⁶⁴ Achillini, *Viridario*, XCVIII v – CV v.

to the *ridoppio* approaching / Immediately throw yourself in *guarda di faccia*.⁶⁵

The language is familiar to that of later fencing texts, with strikes such as *fendente*, *roddoppio*, *mandritto*, and *reverso* described throughout and, more rarely, guards such as *guarda alta*, *guarda a faccia*, and *cinghiara porta di fer*. For example,

The counter and when they feint a *reverso* / Throw the right foot a step in front of the left / Turning [yourself?] to give the *mandritto a traverso* / To the side[s?] and you *mezzo mandritto franco* [?] / Strike but in order that you do not remain committed / Accompany it with the buckler and you will be safe [?] / That you will be in *cinghiara porta di fer* / And with the *mandritto* you will cut their right arm,⁶⁶

There are no descriptions of the guards or strikes, probably the reader is expected to have a general knowledge of fencing terms; whether this suggests that such terms were widely understood is open to interpretation.

Given the date of 1504, this text is twenty years prior to the earliest date suggested for Manciolino's treatise.⁶⁷ Further, Manciolino's references to nymphs and satyrs in each of the prefaces to books two and three of his *Opera Nova* could be inferred as alluding to Achillini's text.⁶⁸ However, no later fencing author seems to acknowledge Achillini as an authority on fencing.

Achillini's desire to promote the Bolognese language could place him as a proponent of the fencing language of a native tradition. The fencing lessons in the 'Viridario' have much of the terminology found in later treatises, the 'common vocabulary' claimed by later fencing authors. Achillini's later strident attempts to assert Bolognese as the superior language to the rival Tuscan would arguably place him as a champion of any cultural traditions originating in his city. Yet while Achillini was certainly partisan to his home, he makes no reference to any 'Bolognese' fencing form. Indeed, the fencing passages in 'Viridario' may have been taken from another author. Key parts of 'Viridario' are taken from 'Foenix' by Pietro Tomai of Ravenna, a Latin text written in 1491, which detailed

⁶⁵ Item col stanco pie passa al suo dritto / Di sotto in su fa un *roddoppio* passando / Per il suo braccio e presto col pie dritto / Al suo sinistro va cossi passando / Da un *falso* al volto non al lato dritto. / Lopposito e mentre chel vien passando / Col pie stanco al redoppio se procaccia / Subito buttate in *guarda di faccia*. Giovanni Filoteo Achillini, *Viridario*, C v.

⁶⁶ Il contra e quandol fingerà il *reverso* / Butta il pie dritto un passo dopo al manco / Voltando a darti il *mandritto a traverso* / A fianchi e tu *mezzo mandritto franco* / Tira ma acciaio che tu non resti immerso / Col brocchier laccompagna e serai franco / Che sei in *cinghiara porta di fer* fitto / E col *mandritto* i taglia il braccio dritto. Giovanni Filoteo Achillini, *Viridario*, CIII r.

⁶⁷ See note 5.

⁶⁸ Manciolino, *Opera Nova*, 9v and 30r.

twelve rules for mnemonics.⁶⁹ A discussion on the immortality of the soul is taken from *Quodlibeta de intelligentiis*, written in 1494 by Filoteo Achillini's brother, Alessandro.⁷⁰ Filoteo's intent on using these texts may have been to make works in Latin more accessible and to demonstrate Bolognese as the means to do this.⁷¹ Conceivably, the fencing verses also come from another text and have been placed in Bolognese verse for the same purpose.

As said, Achillini's 'Viridario' appears to have made no impact in terms of fencing, aside from the possible reference by Manciolino considered above. For someone who espoused the superiority of a Bolognese vernacular, it would seem strange that he would not vaunt a Bolognese tradition. Achillini's intent was not to promote fencing per se, but that of the Bolognese language and his interactions with 'Foenix' was in part to show how a Latin text can be transformed into vernacular. If consistent with the translation of 'Foenix' and his brother's *Quodlibeta de intelligentiis*, Achillini may have derived the fencing instructions from a Latin source. Regardless, Achillini's 'Viridario', with its borrowing from other texts, provides no clear answers as to what might form a Bolognese or a wider, 'common' form of fencing.

VI. CONCLUSION

Does the evidence suggest there was no Bolognese tradition? That depends on how a tradition is defined: a tradition does not need to be identified by those 'living' in it. Peter Burke addresses this issue in his study of Castiglione's *Il Cortigiano*, identifying that while a tradition meant 'handing down', how a tradition is received by later generations should not be confused with what was given or, one would assume, existed in the first place: 'changes often occur in the course of transmitting concepts, practices and values. Traditions are constantly transformed, reinterpreted or reconstructed – whether this reconstruction is conscious or unconscious – to fit their new spatial or temporal environments'.⁷²

On this basis, a modern identification of a Bolognese tradition does not need that contemporary awareness. Where challenge may be given is to any assumption that a lineage existed between various masters and that a tradition existed between them that was clearly specific to Bologna, especially given the lack of context given to such interpretations. Regional grouping of masters into schools or traditions from Italy seems to some degree to be a modern interpretation and the assumptions of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fencing authors such as Castle, Orioli, and Gelli continue to hold

⁶⁹ Lucioi, 'A "Phoenix" Nel "Viridario"', 266.

⁷⁰ Lucioi, 'A "Phoenix" Nel "Viridario"', 268.

⁷¹ Lucioi, 'A "Phoenix" Nel "Viridario"', 270.

⁷² Burke, *The Fortunes of the Courtier*, eBook location 129.

sway. There is no Dardi tradition until evidence exists that Dardi was connected to di Luca or indeed any of the known published fencing masters of Bologna. Similarly, considering the Classense Manuscripts 345 and 346 as anonymous Bolognese fencing texts without demonstrable evidence is misleading. Yet it should be recognised that historical fencers are interested in finding commonality in fencing methodologies. Their search is in the technical detail in order to understand the mechanics of the use of arms. Given the close similarities of the texts and the fact that a majority are identified as Bolognese writers, it is unsurprising that ‘tradition’ or ‘school’ are used as loose, collective terms. Nevertheless, challenges arise when an attempt is made to place these texts within a wider historical context. Focus on texts from Bologna alone may give a distorted view of their place within wider developments in fencing and in society.

This is not to deny that a common tradition existed at all. We know, for example, that the city regulated fencing masters’ fees, which prompted Dardi to negotiate a chair at the university, so there was civic interaction with fencing masters on some level. Marozzo and later Dall’Agocchie bemoaned the lack of examination of masters as had occurred of old, so again, a common understanding of what constituted an acceptable form or methodology is indicated. Further research is required to understand the context in which fencers lived and worked and thereby investigate whether this was a unique civic tradition or part of a wider, common fencing share within north Italy and beyond. Therefore, what can be asserted is that there is considerable opportunity to review treatises from Bologna within the wider fencing corpus in order to gain a deeper appreciation of fencing masters by contemporaries than currently understood today.

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