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Fencing: A Renaissance Treatise



Synopsis

Camillo Agrippa's widely influential Treatise was a turning point in the history of fencing. The author - an engineer, not a professional master of arms - was able to radically re-imagine the art of fencing. His treatise is the fundamental text of Western swordsmanship and also a microcosm of 16th-century thought. It examines the art, reduces it to its very principles, and reconstructs it according to a way of thinking that incorporated new concepts of art, science and philosophy. Every other treatise had to deal explicitly or implicitly with Agrippa's startling transformation of the art and science of self-defense with the sword. All of the fundamental ideas used today - distance, time, line, blade opposition, counterattacks and countertime - are expressed in this paradigm-shifting treatise. This book should be on the shelf of anyone interested in the history, practice or teaching of fencing. 234 pages, 65 illustrations, introduction, bibliography, glossary, appendix, index.

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Customer Reviews

"[O]ne of the most important texts in the history of European martial arts.... Mondschein's introduction to his work helps the reader understand Agrippa -- and the martial practices themselves -- as pivotal agents in the evolving cultural and intellectual systems of the sixteenth century." -- Dr. Jeffrey L. Forgeng

Camillo Agrippa was a noted fencer, architect, engineer and mathematician of the Renaissance. He is considered to be one of the greatest fencing theorists of all time. Though born in Milan, Agrippa lived and worked in Rome, where he was associated with the Confraternity of St. Joseph of the Holy

Land and the literary and artistic circle around Cardinal Alessandro Farnese. He is most renowned for applying geometric theory to solve problems in armed combat. In his *Treatise on the Science of Arms with Philosophical Dialogue* (published in 1553), he proposed dramatic changes in the way swordsmanship was practiced at the time. He is also regarded as the man who most contributed to the development of the rapier as a primarily thrusting weapon. Agrippa was a contemporary of Michelangelo, and the two were probably acquainted. Ken Mondschein holds a Ph.D. in History from Fordham University and is a *PrÃ©vÃªt d'Esgrime* (the teaching rank just below Master). He teaches historical fencing at the Higgins Armory Museum in Worcester, MA, where he is a Research Fellow.

I was on the verge of refunding the book during the first minutes of reading. While it's interesting to get an introduction to the society the manual was aimed at, it was so rambling, just dropping dozens of names of people Agrippa was friends with, was related to, met briefly at some point or maybe possibly had a vague connection to. It also felt like the author was showing off his vocabulary. The sesquipedalian verbiage was impenetrable, as the author would probably write. Hilariously, the author then prefaces the translation itself with saying renaissance writers wrote overly prosaic which could make it hard to follow. Agrippa had nothing on the translator, let me tell you. It didn't help that the Kindle formatting was clearly pretty much unchanged from the printed version. The pages were solid blocks of text with paragraphs marked by indentation instead of empty space, as if page count was an issue, and the page numbers of the printed version being listed mid-sentence in brackets. If you happen to buy this anyway, changing font, increasing margins between lines etc can make it more readable, but it's still terrible. That said, I'm glad I stuck through it. Agrippa's manual is very interesting, both for historical fencing and for some insight into his society. The translation itself is very good, with interesting and helpful footnotes added here and there. It's a shame it's all marred by the formatting. If you buy it anyway, feel free to skip or skim the introduction, it's not worth the hassle. The actual content is really good.

I haven't studied much rapier fencing, but I found this book useful as a starting point because Agrippa's terminology is less confusing to me as someone not as familiar with Italian fencing terminology. There are still some certain terms that one reading this book will have to learn as they go, but no more than one might have to learn to understand, for instance, German longsword. On the whole, Agrippa's presentation of his rapier fencing technique is fairly easy to follow, as long as you have a practice rapier (or any straight, one-handed practice sword, really) on hand to test his concepts. As for the translator's lengthy piece on Agrippa himself and the environment that spawned

his unique style, it is a worthwhile read for anyone seriously interested in the development of Italian fencing schools. I would definitely recommend this book to any serious student of the rapier, or those like myself who have a generalized interest in the development of swordsmanship and how it related to the culture and history that surrounded and spawned it.

This book is really awesome, some people complained about the extended intro, but I disagree, having the historical background of when and in what situation the book was written makes it far easier to understand why the author is making the book as he is. Also just the discussion of how fencing is used is invaluablely useful if you are interested in studying martial arts, so many people just take the stuff as gospel and don't think about understanding where it is coming from, which shows you a lot about how and why it developed as it did. as for Agrippa's writing itself, the style of writing is a little pompous and over the top, but it is all really good information and the images are great.

Very excellent book for those interested in martial arts or historical combat. The introduction provides some very good historical background to the piece.

Again a great find for my research and library. I had been searching for this for some time and as always at an affordable price. Thanks

As a person who is familiar with Talhoffer, and Meyer, this is a very interesting take on sword play. The guards position themselves to natural movements of the body, and while they seem uncomfortable it can be a very effective system. We see this style of fighting today with Krav Maga, reactionary combat based on what the body wants to do. Agrippa decided to make this into an fighting art, and has done it very well. I would like to give a very warm congratulations to Ken Mondschein for translating the text so well. It is very much a living translation, the spirit is still inside the book unlike so many others. In addition to combat oriented works (which is truly only 1/3 of the text itself) Agrippa discusses nearly everything that comes to his mind. If you can follow, it is a very entertaining read to say the least, and educational of the thoughts and ideas of his time. This would make a great primer before learning Capo Ferro's school or for a person just getting started in fencing, and I would just flat out recommend this to any one a fan of the Italian Renaissance.

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