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## DOMENICO ANGELO – A GREAT FENCING MASTER OF THE 18<sup>th</sup> CENTURY AND CHAMPION OF THE SPORT OF FENCING

*The past supplies the key to the present  
and the future. History forms the basis of  
all knowledge and is a convenient avenue  
of approach to any subject of study.*

Douglas Guthrie

**Key words:** history of fencing, fencing as a sport, fencing for women.

### ABSTRACT

The paper explores the colourful history of a famous 18<sup>th</sup>-century fencing master, Domenico Angelo. The author discusses Angelo's fencing school and his well-known fencing textbooks. Domenico Angelo was a great champion of fencing as a sport (not only as preparation for duels or fights). He was also a staunch advocate of fencing for women. The text of his fencing textbooks became incorporated into the Great French Encyclopaedia. He was the founder of a dynasty of fencing masters [9]. Strangely enough, Angelo never approved of the use of masks in fencing exercises.

### INTRODUCTION

*It seems to me that there doesn't exist any  
form of fight which wouldn't eventually  
turn into a game.*

Jean-Charles Pichon

The art of wielding weapons is as old as humanity. Since prehistoric times people in their struggle against nature, animals, and one another have tried to make up for their lack of strength by using weapons. Throughout the centuries the weapons have changed – from very simple ones made of wood and stone, through swords and rapiers, to light and sophisticated small swords. The ways of using weapons have also changed considerably with the passage of time.

Since the earliest times, in order to prepare for a real fight with sharp weapons, people have used specially devised practice weapons and trained in their use. Exercises with practice weapons served mainly as preparation for real fights with sharp weapons in battle or a duel.

Fighting with blunted practice weapons was also – using contemporary terminology – a sport competition. For example, around 1900 BC, i.e. a few hundred years before the beginnings of the ancient Olympic Games in Greece, international “fencing contests” were held in Egypt, as depicted by reliefs and inscriptions on the walls of temples in Luxor. Practice weapons were also known in ancient Crete.

In medieval Europe, knight's tournaments, which included duels with lances, swords and other

kinds of weapons, had been originally based on military exercises. They were spectacular shows resembling modern sport contests. The organisation, audience, referees, “sponsors”, ceremonies of prize giving and rules of rivalry and fair play at these tournaments may all be considered the beginnings of the rituals and customs typical of modern athletic events. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century competitions with heavy swords were held. The valid target area was from the waist upwards, and – for safety reasons – certain convention rules of scoring hits were obligatorily introduced.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century fencing competitions were organized as parts of the celebration of Flower Days held yearly in May. What is significant from a historical point of view is the fact that those competitions were conducted with the foil, and employed a direct elimination system and convention rules. It is worth noticing that these convention rules, written in nineteen concise points, form the basis of the contemporary convention rules for foil and sabre (limitation of valid target, priority of certain actions, e.g. attack or riposte).

The medieval fights with heavy swords (often two-handed swords and shields) were primitive, crude and devoid of high mobility or subtle technique. The decisive factors were strength and endurance. The first signs of modern, highly mobile and technical fencing could be seen in rapier and dagger fencing which developed all over Europe, but peaked in Italy and Spain between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries [11, 12, 13, 14, 15]. Renowned Italian fencing masters of that period introduced such concepts and practices as the importance of distance and space in a bout, feeling of surprise (*scelta di tempo*, timing), counter-attacks, feints, lunge starting with the front foot (previously the movement would begin with the rear foot) and counter-time (*tempo contra tempo*).

In the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, a new weapon appeared known as the small sword (*l’epée de la court*). It was very light, with a relatively short, triangular blade with a handle, knuckle guard (knuckle-bow), *padan*, *pas d’ane*, crossbar and *ricasso*. In fights with the small sword, only thrusts were used (as opposed to rapier bouts, where both cuts and thrusts were applied). It was the first weapon with which one could execute both offensive and defensive actions (the rapier was used only for offensive and counter-offensive actions, whereas defensive actions were made with the dagger). Due to its lightness and relatively short

blade, apart from attacks, also parries and ripostes became very important actions.

As practice with the very light and sharp small sword was dangerous (protective masks were not used as yet), a new weapon called the foil was introduced, which was primarily devised for practice only. It served only as preparation for real bouts with the small sword. The introduction of foil made great progress possible in fencing theory, technique, tactics as well as teaching of fencing with thrusting weapons. Gradually, new ways of footwork, lunges, parries, ripostes, counter-ripostes, engagements and changes of engagement, actions on the blade, etc., were introduced and developed.

The absence of face masks during the first period of foil fencing – the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century – made fencing practice dangerous and led to slow and very careful execution of strokes. The use of practice bouts became practically impossible. Also, certain convention rules had to be strictly adhered to: a) strict definition of the valid target area, i.e. the right-upper part of the trunk; b) priority of certain actions in the case of a double hit: priority of attack over counter-attack, priority of riposte over remise and redouble, priority of *derobe*.

Only in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century did La Boessiere’s introduction of masks create a revolution in fencing practice: it allowed much greater speed of execution of various strokes, attacks, parries, ripostes, etc.; introduced new fencing strokes and – above all – enabled loose play (in my opinion, the introduction of masks to fencing practice was a greater “revolution” than the introduction of the electrical scoring apparatus in the 20<sup>th</sup> century). Strangely enough, not all fencing masters accepted the mask willingly. Some of them, like Domenico Angelo, thought them effeminate. With the passage of time, the masks were generally accepted and played a major part in the development of fencing, not only as preparation for duels, but also as a sport.

As mentioned earlier, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, foil fencing served only one purpose: preparation for real fights with small swords. Only those actions which could be useful in a duel or battle were developed. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, apart from the realistic fighting trend of fencing, a new, more recreational trend in fencing made its appearance: fencing as a sport, art and pastime. One of the most outstanding and renowned champions of this new approach to

fencing was Domenico Tremanondo Angelo. The aim of this paper is to present and discuss the life and work of this famous fencing master, using various literary and iconographic sources.

### THE LIFE, ACTIVITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF DOMENICO ANGELO

*In eighteenth-century London where, to judge from the memoirs of the time, it was remarkable not to be remarkable, an outstanding figure was that of Angelo the famous maître d'armes.*

J.D. Aylward

The founder of “the dynasty and institution of Angelo”, Domenico Malevolti Tremanondo Angelo was born in Leghorn (Livorno) in Italy in 1717. His father, Giovanni Tremamondo, was a rich Livornian merchant, and his mother, Angiola Malevolti, was a Neapolitan marquise.

Angelo's father was preparing him for the merchant profession but, from an early age, Angelo showed a great enthusiasm and interest in horse-riding and fencing. Angelo took his first fencing lessons with a fencing master from Pisa, Andrea Gianfaldoni. It can be assumed that his study of fencing under Gianfaldoni went no further than what at that time was common in the case of young men from rich families for whom swordsmanship, riding and dancing were indispensable parts of polite education. Equally important for young Domenico was traveling. He visited Florence, Turin, Naples, Rome and Venice, where he spent some time with the famous painter, Canaletto. Angelo traveled extensively throughout Italy, demonstrating his outstanding fencing talent and abilities.

He was then sent by his father to Paris to study accounting and trade. In Paris, however, Angelo was mainly occupied with horse-riding, which he learned from the famous riding master, Gueriniere, and fencing, which he studied under the direction of a brilliant fencing master, Teillagory. With his remarkable motor abilities, Angelo soon gained fame as one of the most known and respected “masters of horse-back riding” and an excellent fencer with an impeccable style and astonishing precision of movement.



**Figure 1.** Domenico Angelo c. 1760, drawn by John Gwynn, R.A., engraved by W.W. Ryland (From the *École des Armes*)

Domenico frequented the fencing salle of the famed master, Pierre Donnatieu, where a great display of fencing was to take place between him and another famous fencing figure of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Chevalier de Saint-George [6, 8, 10, 14]. The great fencing gala never came into effect because of the famous Irish actress, Margaret Woffington, whose beauty and coquetry took the Paris society by storm. Angelo was so fascinated by her that he joined her entourage and left France for England about 1750. The British fencing historian, J.D. Aylward, describes the event as follows:

*Following the paths which appeared to his imagination, and a general favourite among his friends, Domenico might have continued indefinitely the life of a man-about-town in Paris had not romance intervened. Fencing at a demonstration arranged at the hotel of the Duc de Nivernais, the handsome Italian was lucky enough to attract the smiles of Mrs. Margaret Woffington, the actress, then on a visit to Paris. Impulsively, the Irish beauty presented Domenico with a bunch of roses taken from her own corsage; the favoured fencer pressed it to his lips before pinning it to his right breast and challenging all opponents to disturb a single leaf of it. Needless to say, the roses emerged undamaged from the ordeal; mutual interest ripened into mutual affection, and when Peg*

*went back to England, Domenico Angelo was her travelling companion [7].*

Angelo's father did not approve of his son's lifestyle and, as a result, he withdrew all his financial support. From that time on, Domenico had to rely on his own resources and initiative. In Angelo's private life, the affair with Peg Woffington did not last very long. Soon after establishing himself in London, Domenico married a young girl with whom he lived happily until the end of his life. This marriage started a new period in Angelo's life. In 1756, Angelo met Lord Pembroke, who returned from his grand voyage across the European continent. Soon Angelo struck up a friendship with Pembroke, Montgomery and other prominent figures of contemporary London, which greatly added to his prestige and position in London high society.

The tales of Angelo's fencing prowess spread widely and an Irish physician, Dr. Keyes, called on him for a friendly sporting duel with foils. Angelo's friends arranged the fencing meeting in the Thatched House Tavern and a great crowd of friends and fencing fans came to watch the event. Domenico Angelo gave such a display of his fencing abilities, beauty of movements and such precision with his weapon that "all of London" was talking about it for a long time. Afterwards, the Princess of Wales declared him the official horse-riding and fencing master for her sons, one of whom would later become King George III. She also found an appropriate location for Angelo's fencing salle in Leicester Square. The friendship with the British royal family and acquaintance with many influential people helped Angelo in the development of his horseback-riding and fencing "enterprise". In 1763, Angelo bought an impressive building, Carlisle House, in Soho.

In 1758, on Pembroke's initiative, Angelo gave a display of horseback riding to King George II, who was profoundly impressed with his skills. With the king's favour, Angelo became a hugely popular riding and fencing master among the royal court, aristocracy, artists, actors and poets.

Founded in Carlisle House, Angelo's Fencing Academy began to develop very successfully. Young pupils learned there fencing, horse riding, foreign languages and exquisite manners. They received a versatile education thanks to – among other things – contacts with outstanding people. Many famous fencers met there, among them the well-known and popular

Chevalier d'Eon (who, as it later turned out to everyone's great astonishment, was a woman).

Domenico Angelo – unlike his great adversary, the distinguished French master Danet – was not an innovator, and he did not really introduce new solutions to fencing technique and tactics. Vigeant, a famous 19<sup>th</sup>-century fencing master and connoisseur, thought that Angelo based his teachings on Labat's school [19, 20, 21]. Published in 1697, Labat's textbook was, perhaps, not so brilliant as de la Touche's or de Lyancourt's, but it contained simple and logical presentations of a new (as compared to rapier) fencing school with thrusting weapons. Labat's book is also priceless because it contains the first ever description of convention rules for fencing with the foil described in nineteen points. These rules were applied at the famous foil competition in Toulouse at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

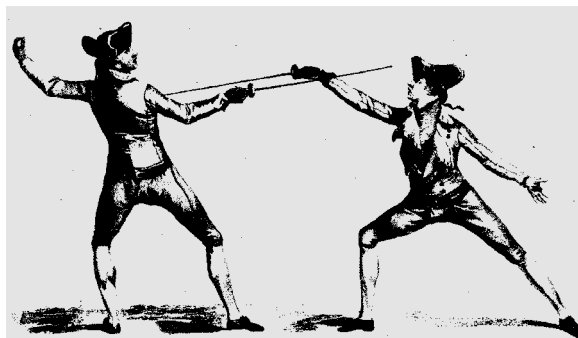
As a teacher of fencing Angelo was rather conservative, but he distinguished himself by a great pedagogical talent and charming personality. He taught classical fencing with the foil (which was a preparation for a real fight with small swords – *épée de la court*). However, and perhaps more importantly, he was also one of the first to treat the cultivation of foil fencing not only as preparation for a duel, but as a sport and pastime. Fencing under Angelo was a fashionable and elite sport, developing "elegance and poise".

Like other masters of the small sword period, Angelo recognised only thrusts to the chest as valid. Angelo's fencing was conventional – after having parried the opponent's thrust one had to allow the opponent to return from the lunge to on-guard position and only then try to score a hit with a riposte. Displacements on the fencing strip were minimal. It was a very static style as compared with present-day fencing. His fencing was highly stylised, artistic and graceful, but lightning fast movements were not prominent. Angelo, further, did not use masks. The masks of carnival type had already been known and described in the famous French *l'Encyclopédie* [17]. The new masks, similar to modern ones, were introduced at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century by the fencing master La Boissiere. This type of mask is depicted in Rowlandson's drawing of Angelo's Academy. As mentioned earlier, Angelo considered the mask to be effeminate. The exercises were conducted with great dignity, courtesy, and attention paid to correctness of movement and beauty of style.

Angelo, in spite of the great emphasis on courtesy and style, had to take into account that his pupils – especially during their journeys to Italy and other countries of continental Europe – might be forced to defend their lives by means of a small sword. Therefore, he also taught various ways of disarming the opponent. In his famous textbook, at least seven drawings depict various ways of disarming and fighting someone who, yielding a rapier, does not obey the rules of courtesy but is, rather, aiming to kill his opponent.

What, speaking most generally, was the essence of Angelo's school? He acquired the simple and basic principles of the French foil school – such as he learned in Paris from the fencing master Teillagory. In Domenico Angelo's famous fencing textbook, the influence of the French masters of *épée de la cour* (practice of which was conducted with foils) – Labat, de Lyancourt, de la Peche and others – is clearly visible. He limited his teaching to relatively simple, verified fencing strokes and actions which he explained in a simple and understandable manner. He emphasised the importance of defensive actions (*parries*), especially when fencing with sharp weapons. (The “predecessor” of the small sword – the rapier – was mainly an offensive weapon; the small sword was the first weapon to be used for both offensive and defensive actions. In fencing with the rapier, *parries*, as we understand them today, were practically unknown. The attacked fencer defended himself either by counter-attack – stop-hits or hits with opposition – or *parried* with the left hand using a dagger. Angelo underlined that each fencer ought to be more efficient in defence than in offence, which was understandable, considering the possibility of fighting with sharp weapons and against a “real” opponent.

Angelo's “weak point”, mentioned before, was disarmament. He distinguished four main varieties of disarmament. They were quite complicated and based on the principle of leverage and application of “pass”, i.e. a cross-over lunge with a simultaneous catching of the opponent's weapon hilt. The value of these actions in fights with sharp weapons was rather doubtful and the great master himself admitted that these varieties of disarmament were more subtle and brilliant when well-executed in a fencing *salle*, than useful with a sharp weapon in hand.



**Figure 2.** Plate from *École des Armes*, drawn by John Gwynn, R.A., engraved by W.W. Ryland

Angelo taught a very “elegant” on-guard position with body weight on the rear foot and the trunk leaning slightly back, which was supposed to protect the face from accidental hits. While executing *parries* and, even more so, in offensive actions – as well as in executing lunges – he recommended a high position of the hand, which made fixing the point easier and, above all, protected the face. (It is extraordinarily curious today, when masks have been used for many years and when the electrical box faultlessly registers the hits, that quite a number of fencing coaches still recommend such a high elevation of the hand. To me, it is an example of “functional fixation”, not to say thoughtlessness.

From the old school, Angelo still taught *flanconade* (in spite of the fact that De Lyancourt had already condemned this action in 1686 [22]), defence with the left hand, evasive half-turn (“*demi-volte*”) and evasive duck (Italian, “*passato sotto*”). Apart from a more modern lunge (with the front foot starting the movement), in certain actions, Angelo advised the application of “pass” (remnant of old Italian rapier play) – which was a long cross-over step in offensive actions. “Pass” may be considered a primitive version of the contemporary *fleche* (note: *sabreurs* used to occasionally apply such a primitive model of *fleche* in “open eyes” attacks; the *fleche* is, of course, now prohibited in *sabre* fencing).

Angelo taught both cross-over steps and lunges (with the rear foot moving before the front foot), an influence of the old rapier school, and modern ways of advancing (described for the first time by Charles Besnard in 1653) as well as a lunge starting with the front foot (described first by Capoferro in 1606 and Giganti in 1610).

Directing the movement of the weapon by means of delicate and precise movement of the fingers – the famous “doigté” of the French school – was still unknown (it was introduced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century). Thus, the weapon was directed and controlled by movements of the elbow joint and the wrist. As Angelo used to say, “The wrist and the elbow are the main actors”.

Angelo was the first fencing master to mention angular thrusts, i.e. thrusts in which the weapons do not form a straight line. They are, so to speak, thrusts “round the corner”, which are very commonly used today in modern foil fencing.

Angelo taught the following basic weapon positions, which constituted either parries or starting positions to execute various thrusts:

- first position (*prime*) – the same as present-day prime parry, the only one of Angelo’s parries with the arm distinctly bent at the elbow;
- second position (*seconde*) – the hand in the pronated position, defending the low outside line;
- third position (*tierce*) – the hand in the pronated position, defending the high outside line;
- fourth position (*quarte, carte*) – the hand in full supination, defending the high inside line;
- fifth position (equivalent of *quinte* or half circular or *mezzo-circio*, semi-circular parry of the Italian school) – the hand supinated, the parry executed with a very wide movement (the present-day *quinte* parry of French school is completely different, and it resembles the low *carte* parry of the Italian school).

“Feather parade” was Angelo’s name for a parry executed in defence of a thrust in *carte* above the weapon (“*carte* over the arm”). Apart from the prime parry, all other parries in Angelo’s school were executed with the upper-limb nearly completely extended and with a relatively high position of the fencer’s hand.

Angelo, like de Lyancourt and the majority of the masters of the small sword, was a great supporter of “circle parade”, which for him was “the main defending position of epee”. This parry is, in a way, a combination of prime and counter-tierce parries. It was executed by extending the arm with a clockwise circular movement of the weapon’s point, trying to make the movement “big enough to cover from head to knees” [2, 3, 10]. It was a parry which could be used against various feints and thrusts, particularly while fighting at night. This way of executing the circle parry,

reminiscent of the old Italian rapier school, was abandoned later by small sword fencing masters. In spite of this, such a progressive and innovative teacher as Danet did teach such a parry.

By “diminishing” *quinte* and circular parries, the French school gave rise to the septime parry the first time the name “septime” was used in the French *l’Encyclopédie* [17]. Today’s fencers may be surprised that such a popular parry as the sixth is not mentioned here. It was introduced in France only in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in Italy even later. The application of the tierce parry in the high outside line constitutes a remnant of old rapier fencing in which parries with the pronated hand position were “strong” and well suited to defend against rapier cuts.

Angelo described and named offensive actions taking with regard to the position of the hand and the initial position of the weapon, thus a thrust with the hand in *seconde* or thrust in *tierce*, etc. After *carte* parry, one could riposte in the line of *carte*, but, equally, one could also riposte in a different way, for example, in the line of *tierce*.

The majority of thrusts, both in attacking and riposting, were executed with the pronated hand (excluding thrusts in *carte* and *quinte*). More precise thrusts with the supinated hand and parries in a supinated position (*sixth*, *octave*) were introduced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Apart from the basic thrusts, e.g. thrust in *tierce*, thrust in *carte*, etc., Angelo also taught a cut-over thrust (“*coupé*”). The execution of *coupé*, or cut-over thrusts, was perfected in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In a bout, these thrusts were very effective at taking an opponent by surprise and very difficult to parry. Fencing constantly develops; it undergoes various changes and, quite often, old actions come back and are reused in a slightly altered form. Thus, in modern epee and foil fencing, apart from classical directed and fixed thrusts, thrown hits – so-called “flicks” – not to be confused with cut-over thrusts which are not a way of fixing the point, but a different kind of thrust – are very often used.

The majority of masters who wrote about fencing at that time put a great emphasis on describing various ways of fighting against a left-handed opponent. Usually, they came to the conclusion that the difficulties in fencing against a left-hander were simply due to the fact that they were rarely encountered. It is so, but it is not the a complete explanation. The percentage of left-handed finalists of great international competitions

as compared with the percentage of left-handed people in society in general is markedly higher. Angelo was of the firm opinion that an efficient fencer ought to practise and skillfully yield the weapon with his right hand and left hand alike. Perhaps under the influence of his opinion, the Earl of Pembroke advised his son, Herbert – who took fencing lessons in Paris with the famous master Monet – to “practise fencing every day using, as often as possible, the left hand”.

Angelo would give some lessons left handed and also insisted on his pupils practising various strokes left handed. A fencing master giving a lesson with his left hand allows the pupil to prepare for bouts with left-handed opponents. Left-hand fencing exercises have also a number of very positive influences: improvement of motor co-ordination, prevention of one-sidedness and scoliosis, and provision of active rest and skill transfer (perfecting certain movements with the left hand leads to their better execution with the right hand).

Angelo’s description of feint attacks was a proof of his extensive knowledge and practical experience as well as his ability of clear and logical presentation of difficult and complicated actions. Below is a short example of the style with which Angelo describes one of varieties of feint-attack: feint of thrust with opposition in the line of tierce, feint of disengagement thrust in the inside line, disengagement thrust in the outside line (simplified description using contemporary terminology):

*If the opponent’s weapon is outside your weapon, you must execute a short thrust with opposition with a stamping of your foot, and when you feel that the opponent is executing pressure on your weapon, execute a feint into the inside line, then subtly disengage into the outside line, thrust in carte over the arm, executing a cross-over lunge with the left leg according to the previously described principle of this movement. You should notice that all attacks executed in the outside line are parried with a high position of the hand in tierce, whereas those in inside line are parried with the prime or carte parry with a high position of the hand, hand always on the level of the face [2].*

Describing another feint-attack, finishing with disengagement thrust in carte, Angelo adds, “After having executed this, return to on-guard position and try to find the opponent’s blade by circle parry”. One may guess that this action was

a safety measure against the opponent’s possible thrust, if the initial attack did not succeed.

In 1763, the first edition of Angelo’s magnificent work, *L’École des Armes* [2], appeared. It is one of the best known and luxuriously published fencing textbooks. The volume contains forty-nine magnificent engravings, drawn by J. Gwynn and engraved by Crignon, Ryland and Chamber. For these drawings the great master posed himself, and his partners were his son Harry, Lord Pembroke, the Chevalier d’Eon, and others. The beauty of these engravings and the accuracy of the depicted positions and movements are most impressive. Rich pupils from among English aristocracy, nobles and people of culture and art greatly helped in the publication of the book. The original text was in French. In 1765, a second, bilingual edition [3] was published in French and English. The third edition appeared in 1767 and was very much like the second. In 1787, Angelo’s son, Harry – the then headmaster of Angelo’s Academy – published a book [5] which was a reproduction of his father’s work, containing only the English text with all the drawings reduced in size.

The system of fencing presented by Angelo was the one which, in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, was promoted and applied by the French Royal Academy of Fencing – “Compagnie des Maitres en fait d’Armes du Roy en la Ville et Fauxbourgs de Paris” (“*The Royal Association of Masters of Yielding Weapons of the City and Suburbs of Paris*”). This famous fencing school was dissolved during the French Revolution after 200 years of flourishing existence. Augustin Rousseau, the Academy’s last head, whose father and grandfather had taught King Louis XIV and Louis XV, respectively, was guillotined in 1793, most probably for the mere fact that he had been, as the Act of Accusation put it, “Maître d’armes des enfants de Capat” (“*The Fencing Master of the Children of Capat*”). Notwithstanding its tragic end, one has to admit that this famous fencing academy had great merits in fencing development, not only in France, but in other countries as well.

Domenico Angelo admitted to being greatly influenced by his master in Paris and truly appreciated the skills of French masters. He wrote, among other things: “I should be unjust, if I did not admit the talents of French fencing masters. In my opinion they are the first fencing masters of the world as far as courtesy and efficacy”.

Emile André [1] claims the famous Chevalier d'Eon, who spent several years with Angelo in London and who, like Angelo, was a pupil of Teillagory in Paris, was extremely helpful in preparing Angelo's book.

When Angelo's seminal work appeared in London, Diderot and his co-workers in Paris were very busy publishing the famous French *L'Encyclopédie* [17], which greatly influenced the public opinion just prior to the French Revolution. Fascinated by Angelo's magnificent publication, clarity of style and beautiful drawings of *L'Ecole des Armes*, Diderot asked the author for permission to publish its text in *L'Encyclopédie*. Angelo agreed, and in Volume IV of the Encyclopaedia, under the heading of "Fencing", Angelo's work appeared together with 49 drawings, reduced in size by Lachausse.

The choice of an Italian, who – though he studied fencing in Paris – taught in London and – what is worse – did not possess an official fencing master diploma, to author an entry on fencing in *l'Encyclopédie* caused shock and indignation among the members of the Royal Fencing Masters Academy in Paris. Both law and custom gave these fencing masters the exclusive privilege to teach fencing and award fencing master diplomas. The Fencing Masters Academy enjoyed numerous rights and privileges that had been granted to it by successive French kings for nearly 200 years. Although Domenico Angelo did study fencing in Paris under the direction of an excellent French master and, no doubt, was an excellent fencer himself, he, formally, had no right to use the title *Maitre en fait d'Armes* because he never submitted himself for an official examination at the Academy. Particularly offended was Guillaume Danet, Head of the Royal Fencing Masters Academy in Paris.

In spite of Angelo's misunderstandings with Danet (see below) – and arguably these quarrels further increased Master Angelo's fame – his academy prospered excellently, not only thanks to the number of regular pupils but also many renowned guests from England and abroad. The master earned about 4,000 pounds a year, which was a fairly substantial sum of money in those times.

The pupils of Angelo's Fencing Academy were not only men, but – which was a great novelty in those days – also women. They were mostly theatre actresses, who probably dreamt of the role of Hamlet.

In 1760, having failed to draw proper conclusions from the magnificent role in *King Lear* of his famous friend and actor, David Garrick, Angelo handed down administration of his academy in London to his son, Harry, and himself, took a fencing master's post in Eton College. Harry [4], and afterwards his sons, continued Angelo's academy traditions in London for many years.

Two centuries later "the great son of the Korean nation", the beloved and respected Kim Ir Sen, said wisely, "As long as one lives, one should work". Angelo probably did not foresee these words, but he worked very intensively, giving fencing lessons until the end of his life. He died in 1802 at the age of 86 – one typical example of the vitality and energy of a large number of great fencing masters.

#### DISPUTES, MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND QUARRELS BETWEEN ANGELO AND DANET

*J'aurais été bien à plaindre s'il m'eut  
fallu copier les figures et les principes de  
son traité. . . que ne contient rien de plus intéressant,  
rien de nouveau, que celui du  
sieur Girard, dont il a rajourni le erreurs.*

G. Danet

As mentioned earlier, the insertion of Angelo's work in *l'Encyclopédie* made G. Danet, Head of the French Academy of Fencing Masters, most indignant. At the time, Danet was busy publishing his own work, *Art des Armes* [16], which appeared in 1766. Danet's indignation became still greater when Angelo accused him of plagiarism in the London press. The accusation, as a matter of fact, was rather baseless, especially considering the fact that Angelo could not have known Danet's text, which appeared for the first time in 1766.

In his work, Danet severely criticised Angelo's views and presented new views on the art of fencing. In his book, he showed a great knowledge of the subject and criticised not only Angelo, but generally all obsolete views, methods and practices. In fact, Danet proved himself to be a very bold innovator.

In expressing his views (in a beautiful literary style), Danet accepted the old habit of his predecessors of introducing into the text the



character of a very curious and inquisitive pupil who asks questions which are then answered in detail by the experienced master. Danet's "Master" makes very critical remarks about "the author from London" (having in mind, of course, Domenico Angelo). Danet criticises the orthodox methods of teaching fencing used by old coaches, including obsolete and dangerous tricks of fencing with rapier and dagger. "Angelo, for example" – stresses Danet – "teaches such follies as disarming the opponent, executing a pass; he teaches voltes and such absurdities as fighting with the dagger, cloak and lantern. In other words, anachronisms which have disappeared in civilised countries".

Danet tried unsuccessfully to introduce a completely new system of fencing terminology and classification of fencing actions, which was highly complicated but more compatible with the new school of fencing. Master Danet divided his teaching system into three stages:

1. Simple Play – exercises with the fencing master,
2. Two-sided Play – exercises with an active opponent,
3. Decisive Play – fights (loose play, training bouts).

Danet condemned catching the opponent's weapon, disarming attempts, voltes and passes; he demonstrated them, however, advised against using them. In fighting with sharp weapons, he advised avoidance of feints and compound actions. Further, he recommended using circular parries in defensive and offensive actions (his advice is significant in modern fencing as well).

Danet's work met in turn with very sharp criticism of a certain Mr. MX, who turned out to be the famous La Boissiere (the father), known for the introduction of a new and safer fencing mask (previously, either no mask was used at all, or only a carnival mask, which offered little protection). In 1767, Danet wrote a second volume of his work in which, among other things, he replied to the criticisms of Mr. MX.

In spite of the fact that the new terminology proposed by Danet was not accepted, his fencing teaching system became generally recognized as state-of-the-art and efficacious. The second edition of Danet's book was officially accepted and recommended by the Royal Academy of Fencing and, for many years, it was regarded as a basic textbook on fencing, withstanding even the great shock of the French Revolution. The third edition

of his work appeared in year IV of the French Republic. In 1818, Danet's work was replaced by – a typical irony of fate – La Boissiere's son's book.

As far as the argument between Angelo and Danet was concerned the infuriated Danet, having removed all restraints which ought to characterise an author writing about his professional colleague, burst out with indignation, writing:

*I ought to be really pitied, if forced to imitate Mr. Angelo's drawings and theories contained in his treatise. In his principles, there is nothing new and nothing interesting, like in Girard's work, the mistakes from which he simply copied. One may defend one's own work, but not at the cost of truth. As far as my engravings are concerned, the originals of which are open for inspection, they are perhaps not so beautifully done as Mr. Angelo's but, unlike him, I do not have the financial support of two-hundred thirty-six English gentlemen. My drawings, however, are far more correct as far as the detailed presentation of my art is concerned. What reflections, what search were made by Mr. Angelo when everything that he could do was a repetition, using different words, mistakes and unnecessary strokes, of what we condemn in the old masters, and all which he can add from himself comes down to explanation of ridiculous bouts with rapier, cloak and lantern which, anyway, are used no more in Italy, nor in France nor England? I must admit, that all of this surprises me very much! [16]*

Danet's anger must have had some negative influence on the clarity of his judgment and objectivity. As Angelo did not read Danet's work before suspecting him of plagiarism, then it is also possible that Danet did not get precisely acquainted with Angelo's work. The charge that Angelo copied the mistakes of Girard [18], an ex-naval officer, author of a textbook from 1736, was quite baseless. Girard, in contradiction to the contemporary masters distinguished himself by a strange attachment to parries with the left hand, in spite of the fact that defence with the left arm was then generally criticised as inefficient and quite dangerous. Angelo only once mentions a parry with the left hand (in connection with "flanconade") and he does so with a certain hesitation, deeming the movement of the left hand as an additional insurance while executing a thrust with opposition; Danet, himself, accepted the use of the left forearm in similar cases. Angelo advocated evasion

(dodging by a half-twist) to the right – “demi-volte” – rather than parrying with the left forearm.

Danet criticised and made fun of all of Angelo’s advice regarding rapier, lantern, cloak, etc., but: a) he failed to notice that the great majority of Angelo’s engravings and descriptions concerned classical fencing with the small sword; b) Angelo wrote for readers who often visited the European continent and were subjected to the danger of assaults and armed fights with people who it would be difficult to consider gentlemen and who used various weapons and treacherous tricks; c) the examination for a fencing master’s diploma in the Parisian Academy of Fencing included fighting against six chosen fencing masters with small swords and also with rapiers and daggers.

Angelo did not entirely reject the overcoat or cloak since he thought that in the event of an assault by bandits one might wrap the left arm in a cloak to use it as a shield. The overcoat could assure good defence against a cutting weapon. Also, one could throw the overcoat over the opponent’s head or weapon.

Angelo gave his pupils one more interesting bit of advice in the case of a fight with bandits and robbers. He recommended directing the thrust, not to the trunk, but to the face, explaining that people of suspicious character have a habit of putting under their clothes something which would protect them from injury by thrusts to the body. (Incidentally, wearing protective iron vests was considered very ungentlemanly. Once six Englishmen attacked a very famous Italian fencing master in London whom they disliked very much. The Italian master was not wounded because he wore a protective wire vest under his clothes. The fact that six armed men sneaked up on one man seemed quite acceptable, but there was great indignation at his indecency in wearing a protective vest).

As mentioned earlier, the quarrels and misunderstandings between Danet and Angelo did not, in the least, degrade Angelo’s position and fame and, perhaps, on the contrary, added to his prestige and popularity.

## CONCLUSIONS

*That which is in the present moment may  
be understood only as a consequence of  
that which was and is the embryo of  
that which will be.*

Jan Zieleniewski

1. Becoming acquainted with the history of fencing, even in such a tiny fragment as this paper, allows us to better understand the present state of fencing and to foresee its further development. For example, a conflict between conventional rules, poise, certain artificiality of foil fencing in Angelo’s times and the brutal reality of armed assault by dark characters, finds today its reflection in the conflict between convention rules of foil and sabre (described precisely and formally in the FIE rules for competitions) and the sheer desire to score a hit and win the bout along with the ways in which the rules are applied by referees. As a matter of fact, the exaggerated artificiality of the conventional 19<sup>th</sup>-century foil rules led to the introduction of a new practice weapon in fencing salles – the epee, whose rules correspond exactly with the rules of a duel. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the artistic and highly conventional foil did not serve as a good preparation for duels, which were very common at that time.
2. Domenico Angelo, who taught fencing in London, and Danet, President of the French Academy of Fencing in Paris, were ones of the most famous fencing masters of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. They both, in their own, different ways, had a great impact on the development of fencing. Danet was a great innovator, who introduced numerous interesting and precious insights into the theory, practice and methodology of fencing. Angelo represented a classical school, but his novelty and merit was his treatment of fencing not only as a preparation for duels or armed fights, but also as a useful past-time and excellent form of physical recreation. He created a superb fencing academy in London, authored an excellent textbook and found a whole dynasty of fencing masters. He became, in a way, an institution. He kept friendly relations with representatives of the English aristocracy and the world of culture and art. His unique pedagogical abilities were used not only in fencing, but also in teaching horse-riding. He was very much interested in theatre and had plenty of friends and pupils among actors.
3. Angelo’s introduction of fencing exercises, meant not only to be combat preparation but also a recreational sport, opened the way to fencing as a sport and highly competitive

activity at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: the foundation of fencing clubs of a new style, new methods and forms of fencing training, fencing competitions and championships, fencing at the Olympic Games, development of national fencing federations and the FIE, and women participating in fencing (recently in all three weapons).

4. Differences of opinion and, heated discussions, even quarrels, very often constitute a creative element, aiding the development and better understanding of a given branch of human activity.
5. Scientists dealing with sport theory should contemplate Danet's work, his creative innovations, bold conceptions and attempts to introduce new terminology. There are sport and fencing theoreticians who are afraid, like the devil of holy water, of new ideas or terms which are not in accord with their obsolete and dogmatic system of knowledge and practical abilities.
6. Angelo told his pupils that acquisition and application of defensive actions are far more important than skills in offensive actions. It is understandable as in those times, a person could be forced to defend his own life with a weapon in hand. This is why, for a long period of time, fencing instructors paid special attention and devoted a lot of time and energy to teaching parries. In present-day competitive fencing, particularly important are offensive actions – above all – all kinds of attacks. Nowadays, they are most frequently used in competition, and this is why fencing coaches devote much time to teaching and perfecting attacks, neglecting the teaching of parries. This, of course, is a mistake and one-sidedness, since the psychological and technical basis of an offensive and active style of fencing is confidence in unforeseen defence. This means that an active and offensive fencer preparing his attack must always be ready to take a parry or execute a counter-attack in the event of his opponent's unexpected attack.
7. Angelo was one of the first masters to insist on the importance of exercises with the left hand.
8. It is said that the type of weapon determines the fencing. It is true. When the weapons were very heavy – for example, mediaeval swords or unwieldy and very long rapiers – fencing bouts were rather primitive. Only the introduction of

the light, easily yielded and short small sword brought fencing to the level of art. Technique, tactics, diversity of actions, mobility, speed and methodology of training attained a very high level. The types of weapons and variety of fencing equally influence the need of appropriate elements of physical fitness – energy and co-ordination abilities. A mediaeval fight with a two-handed heavy sword demanded only a great mastery of strength and endurance. Fighting with rapiers already required better motor co-ordination, greater speed and more intense concentration of attention. Fencing with small swords and foils and later with modern dueling swords, “epees”, and contemporary sporting weapons, decidedly influenced the need to develop appropriate fitness abilities. Therefore, as far as co-ordination is concerned, a fast, mobile fight with light weapons requires a very high level of co-ordination abilities – including motor educability (ability to learn new strokes and change old strokes), motor control (accuracy of movement, precision and rhythm) and, above all, motor adaptability (choice of an appropriate action in a given situation in response to opponent's actions and change of tactical situation of a bout) and lightening speed motor improvisation (application of a stroke or sequence of strokes, in changing tactical situations with an active opponent, in a way never practised in that form). Contemporary fencing demands a high level of development of energy fitness: increased significance of speed, power and specific endurance (resistance to perceptual fatigue, emotional fatigue, cognitive fatigue and physical fatigue). Of special importance are psychomotor qualities – i.e. psychological processes, strictly connected with motor activities: speed, accuracy and selectivity of perception on a higher, conceptual-functional level; various qualities of attention (concentration, range of attention, mobility of attention, shifting of attention, wide and narrow attention, external and internal attention); speed and accuracy of choices of decision; ability to change one's intention during the execution of a preconceived action as a response to the opponent's unexpected movement, etc.

9. Finally, the knowledge of fencing history is not only of a great cognitive value but also of immense practical and didactic importance.

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