

Introduction to Giganti's Rapier and Dagger

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Introduction

Niccolotto Giganti was a fencing master in Venice in the late 16th/early 17th century. In this class we will be doing an overview of some of his single rapier techniques as laid out in his 1606 manual. Giganti himself recommended that all fencers be competent in single rapier since one would not always have a secondary weapon, and one might drop their secondary in the course of a duel.

All quotes and pictures are taken from Tom Leoni's 2010 translation.

General Stance

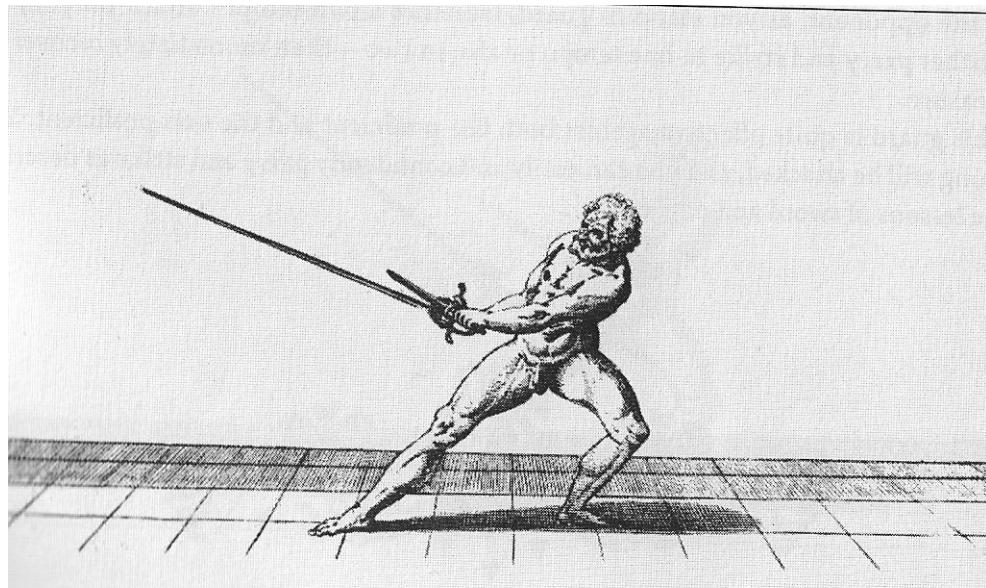
Giganti does not describe his stance in much detail so we must use his general guidelines and the plates to determine what stance he advocates. He recommends a stance that is “preferably narrow rather than wide so that you have the capacity to extend it”. Looking at the illustrations, his definition of “narrow” is really only in comparison to some other masters, as the figures are clearly standing with feet wider than shoulder width. They are somewhat profiled, and the back foot is turned out somewhere between 90 and 135 degrees. We know from modern anatomy that the exact angle of turn-out is a matter of personal comfort since there is a wide variation in hip structure. In the first half of the book their weight is a little more on the back foot, and the knees are slightly bent, optimizing the ability to perform a quick, balanced lunge.

“Deceptive” Guards with Sword and Dagger

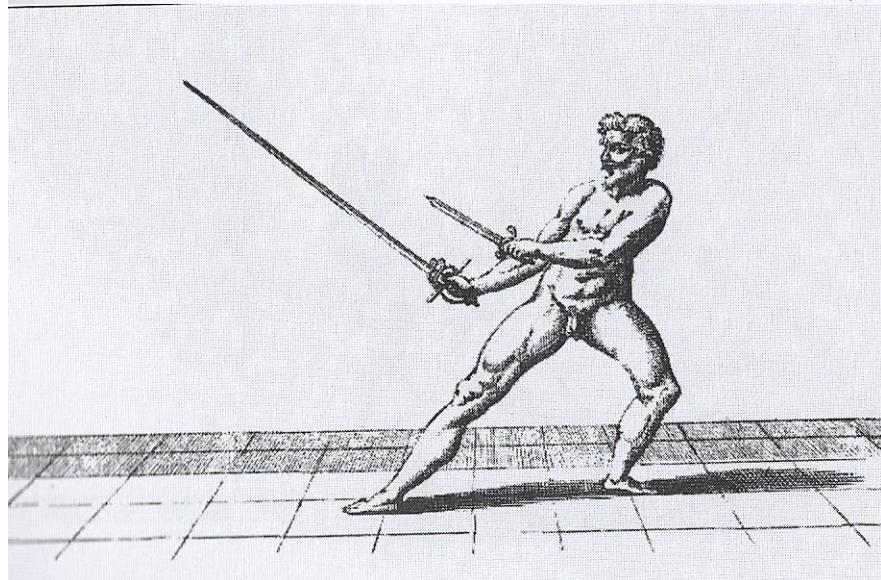
Regarding sword placement, Giganti states that “...every motion of the sword is a guard to the knowledgeable fencer, and all guards are useful to the experienced man; conversely, no motion is a guard to the ignorant, and no guard is effective for someone who does not know how to use it”. Looking at his plates, the fencers use a guard where the sword is partially extended, the hand is about at the height of the bottom ribs, and the point is aiming at the opponent's face. The dagger is held a little above the sword, with the dagger hand a little closer to the body than the sword hand, with the dagger pointing somewhat up and forward.

Giganti presents three guards with the dagger that “leave one part of the body open, while keeping all the others well defended. This way, the opponent can attack you only in that one opening.... As he does so, he will be in danger: as soon as he launches his thrust or cut, you can parry and strike him in a single

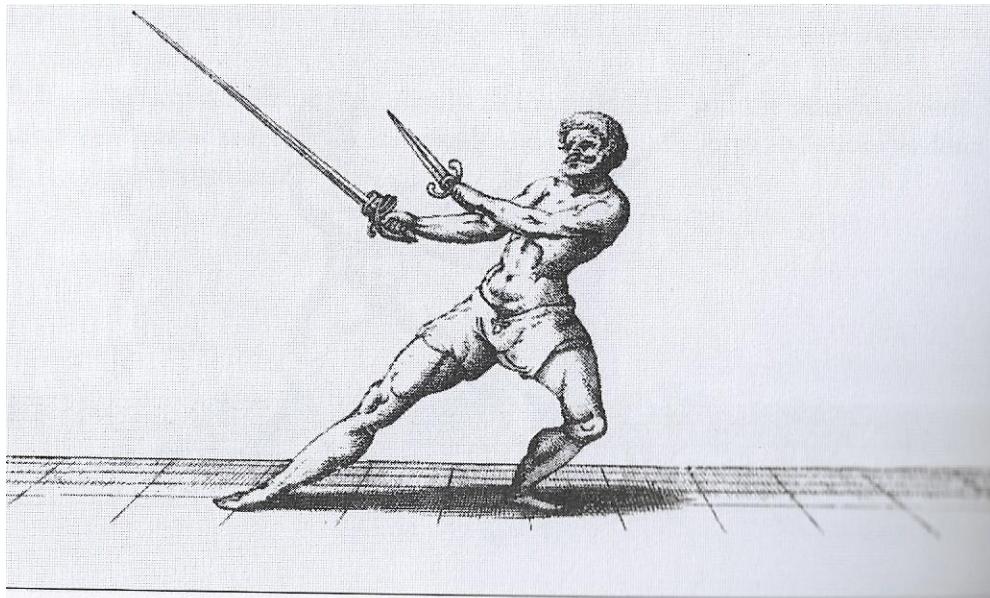
tempo, stepping forward with the foot that accompanies the sword while you parry." Throughout this book Giganti advocates using the sword and dagger together in a single tempo to parry and counterattack at the same time. In these guards the forward knee is straight and the weight mostly on the back leg, as opposed to the more centered single sword stance. This allows for maximum sword extension without having to take a large step forward.



30 – Guard with invitation to the left side of the body



31 – Guard with invitation to the right side of the body



32 – Guard with invitation to the chest (between the weapons)

Bibliography:

Leoni, Tom. (2010). *Ventian Rapier: The School, or Salle*. Wheaton, IL: Freelance Academy Press.