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## Half full? Translating *Meza* and *Tutta* in *Fior di Battaglia*.

The masters of the arts of defence that came before us have left us with an incredibly rich and diverse record of treatises, from which we distil our modern practice. These works come from all over Europe, and, in addition to English, were written in Latin, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, and French. Unfortunately most researchers currently active in working with the source material are not trained linguists, nor native speakers of the languages they are working with. This leaves us anglophones working in any tradition other than the English with the vexed problem of either finding authoritative translations, or translating the sources ourselves. A great deal of excellent work has been done in that field, by far better linguists than I, but still the bulk of the material remains unavailable to the majority of interested people.

With that in mind, I thought a critical look at the goals and process of translation might be in order. Firstly, the purpose of any translation must be kept in mind. Generally speaking, outside of western martial arts, the goal is simply to render the artistic or mechanical content of an original source into another language. For example, most of us have read at least a bit of Homer or Dante; very few have done so in the original languages- but when we look at the translations available, it is the original author who is credited on the front cover, not usually the translator. Pick up *Zorro*, a novel by Isabel Allende, in English, and you have to flip past the cover and to the title page before you notice that it was originally written in Spanish. Likewise, the instructions for any appliance you buy in Europe will usually come in at least four languages, with no sense of priority being given to any of them; chances are, the original was English for a Phillips, German for a Bosch, Italian for a Zanussi, etc., but there is no sign of that (or credit given to translators) in the booklet itself. However, I have found that most modern amateur translators dealing with fencing texts are very keen to make it clear that any translation is also an interpretation, and with that in mind render the text as verbatim as possible, often leaving technical terms untranslated. The objective for these works is not to replace the original source, but to make it a bit easier for a beginner to work with the original: its function then is to serve as a bridge between the anglophonic reader and the (for example) Italian source.

This can be a great help to those readers who wish to work with the original, but seriously hinder a reader who wants an authoritative translation, that he can immediately begin working from.

Let me take as an example two possible translations of a passage from one of the more influential treatises, Fiore's *Fior di Battaglia*.

This passage defines some of the key terms we use when analysing his Art, and comes from page 22 recto.<sup>1</sup>

*Noy sono doi guardie una si fatta che l'altra, e una e contraria de l'altra e zascuna altra guardia in larte una simile de l'altra sie contrario salvo le guardie che stano in punta, zoe posta lunga e breve e meza porta di ferro che punta por punta la piu lunga fa offesa inanci. E zo che po fare una po far l'altra. E zascuna guardia po fare volta stabile e meza volta. Volta stabile che stando fermo po zugar denanci e di dredo de una parte. Meza volta si e quando uno fa un passo o inanzi o indredo, e chossi po zugar de l'altra parte denanzi e di dredo. Tutta volta sie quando uno va intorno uno pe cum laltro pe, luno staga fermo e laltro lo circundi. E perzo digo che la spada si ha tre movimenti, zoe volta stabile, meza volta, e tutta volta. E queste guardie sono chiamata luna e l'altra posta di donna. Anchora sono iy cose in larte, zoe passare, tornare, acressere e discesse.*

Let us begin with a translation in the style of one trying to bridge the gap:

<sup>1</sup> These Latin terms are the technical names for the front and back surfaces of a page: the *recto* is the right-hand (usually odd-numbered) page in an open book, and the back of that page (which, when the page is turned, becomes the left-hand page, usually even-numbered) is the *verso*. Definition from The Columbia Guide to Standard American English, <http://www.bartleby.com/68/33/5033.html>

We are two guards one so made like the other, and one is the counter to the other. And each of the other guards in the art, one similar to the other is the counter, except for the guards that stand in the point: thus *posta longa*, and *breve* and *meza porta di ferro* because point against point the longer makes offense first. And what one can do the other can do. And each guard can do *volta stabile* and *meza volta*. *Volta stabile* is when standing firm, one can play in front and behind on one side. *Meza volta* is when one makes a pass forwards or backwards, and so can play on the other side in front and behind. *Tutta volta* is when one goes turning one foot around the other foot, one stays firm, and the other circles around it. And therefore I say the sword has three movements, thus: *volta stabile*, *meza volta* and *tutta volta*. And these guards are called one and the other *posta di donna*. Also there are 4 things in the art, thus: *passare*, *tornare*, *acressere* and *discesse*.

Notice how much of the original is actually untranslated; the Italian terms jump out like currants in a cake. Some of the phrases make no real sense: what is a "guard that stands in the point"? And how clumsy does the syntax feel: "And each of the other guards in the art, one similar to the other is the counter", for example, should that not read something like "Guards that are similar to each other are used in this art to counter each other"?

Now, that same paragraph translated more completely would read something like this:

We are two guards, similar to each other, and one is the counter to the other. Guards that are similar to each other are used in this art to counter each other, except for those that have the point in line (long position, short position and the middle iron door), because when point opposes point, the longer strikes first. What one guard can do the other can also. Each guard can do a stable turn, and a half turn. A stable turn is when one can play in front and behind on one side, without stepping. A half turn is when one passes forwards or backwards, and so can play on the other side in front and behind. A full turn is when one turns one foot around the other foot, one foot stays firm, and the other circles around it. And therefore I say the sword has three movements too: a stable turn, a half turn and a full turn. And these positions are both called the woman's guard. Also there are four things in the art: to pass, to return, to advance and to retreat.

It is sorely tempting to fix some of Fiore's ordering of the material: the sentence " And these positions are both called the woman's guard" clearly belongs near the beginning, not between the three movements the sword can do, and the four things in the art. It is also tempting to be a bit more specific, and call said movements "turns" and said things "steps", but that would go beyond the translator's brief.

It is important to remember that for the original readers the so-called technical terms did not sound markedly different from normal usage. Imagine some future translator of an English book on golf translating "swing" into Chinese. To us, it's just "swing". To them, there may be all kinds of tricky alternative renderings that makes it much easier to leave the term untranslated ("child's swing"? "Swinging sixties"? "swinging from the chandeliers"?). And what is in Italian a very simple term is for us fraught with complications. Let me take for example the work I had to do before settling on my interpretation/translation of *tutta* and *meza*. It involved first defining the common meaning of the words, then examining every context in which they occur within the source text, before concluding with a firm idea of what they directly mean, and what they imply. For the convenience of those readers unfamiliar with Italian I have provided rough, verbatim translations of the quotations. These should not be considered authoritative nor final.

### **When half of a whole is a middle: the terms '*tutta*' '*meza*' and '*mezana*'**

These two terms are commonly used in relation to each other, principally to qualify the *volte* (turns), the *incrosada*, the grip on a lance, and certain guards. There are many places in which the terms are juxtaposed; for example, on page 22 recto where the *volte* are discussed (*volta stabile*,

*meza volta* and *tutta volta*), and on page 46 recto where "*a meza lanza*" indicates holding the lance by the middle, and "*a tutta lanza*" indicates holding the lance by the (butt) end. Regarding the guards, the terms are used extensively on pages 9 recto, 23 verso, 24 recto, 24 verso, 32 verso, 35 verso, and 39 recto.

It is therefore necessary to establish through internal evidence what these distinctions mean, and whether the terms are related when they are used to qualify the guard position, the turns, and the grip on the weapon. Let us begin with the guards.

## Half and whole guards

The most ubiquitous of these is the guard *porta di ferro*, which first appears on page 6 recto in its basic, unarmed form. Fiore is careful to state that "*di lanza azza Spada e daga ò grande parte*" (of lance, axe, sword and dagger I have a great part). Sure enough, versions of this guard are shown with all these weapons. The distinction in question is first made in the dagger section, which begins with five possible variations on *porta di ferro*:

1. *Tutta porta di ferro*, simple: with the dagger held in the right hand in a forward grip (as in the attacker in the plays of the 8th and 9th remedy masters);
2. *Tutta porta di ferro*, doubled: with no dagger but the right hand gripping the forearm (shown again in the 8th play of the fifth remedy master of dagger, and the third play of the 8th remedy master);
3. *Meza porta di ferro* doubled and crossed: with the dagger held in a reverse grip, and the left hand crossing underneath the right and holding the blade (as in the 7th play of the 3rd remedy master, which is a counter remedy, and as held by the 7th remedy master);
4. *Mezana porta di ferro*, doubled: with the dagger held in a forward grip, and the left hand holding the blade (as seen in the plays of the 6th remedy master);
5. *Tutta porta di ferro*, doubled with the arms crossed: with no dagger (as in the second remedy master, and again in the 10th play of the fifth master, and the 4th play of the eighth remedy master).

This introduces the terms *meza* and *tutta* for the first time, though with no attempt at explaining them. Simple (*sempia*) and doubled (*dopia*) clearly refer to the hands; in double versions, the hands are joined, either by gripping one wrist, by hold the dagger in both hands, or by crossing the forearms. These terms are apparently independent of the *meza/tutta* distinction. In later sections, the distinction between a "*meza*" and a "*tutta*" *porta di ferro* becomes more obvious, and the distinction is made for guards of the sword, pollax and the spear. The distinction was not made in the *abrazare* (wrestling) section, so we may surmise it is an artifact of the weapon. It is made in guards held against the dagger, while unarmed, so it is possible that the presence of the weapon in the hands of either party affects the name.

It is also possible that the *meza porta di ferro* is in some way distinct from the *mezana porta di ferro*: *meza* suggests 'half'; *mezana* suggests 'middle'.

We can see from the pictures that with the sword, the middle iron gate is held with the point in line (confirmed in the text of page 22 recto), and the complete iron gate with the point well out of the line. However, this is reversed with the spear, where the point is held out to the right in the *meza* version, and upright in the *tutta*.

When held unarmed, all the *tutta* guards have the arms crossed or joined; when unarmed with hands separate, no distinction is made (the guard is just "*porta di ferro*").

The illustrations all show the guards from the side. When adopting these stances face on to a mirror, one fact leaps out; in every case, when armed, in a *meza* or *mezana porta di ferro*, the weapon is held in the centreline of the body (with the spear, the weapon is held by the middle with both ends available; as Fiore states "*chossi o ben ferro in lo pedale che ala punta*" (there is as good an iron on the foot (of the lance) as at the point). In the *tutta* variants, the weapon is held to the side.

The clincher to this argument comes on page 24 verso:

*Questo si è dente di cengiaro lo mezano e perco che sono doy denti di zengiaro l'uno tutto, laltro si è mezo però e ditto mezo, perzò ch'ello sta in mezo de la persona e zò che pò fare lo ditto dente pò fare lo mezo dente. E per modo che fieri lo zengiaro a la traversa de la spada del compagno. E sempre butta punte e discrova lu compagno e sempre guastagli le mane a talvolta la testa e gli brazzi.*

This is *dente di cengiaro lo mezano* (the middle boar's tooth) because there are two boar's teeth one is *tutta* (whole) and the other is *meza* (half), it is called *mezo* because it is in the middle of the *persona* (person or body) and that which the said *dente* does, so does the *mezo dente*. And in the way that the boar strikes on the traverse, in that way one strikes with the sword, that always strikes with the sword on the traverse of the sword of the companion (i.e. crossing his sword). And always throws thrusts and uncovers your companion and always destroys the hands and sometimes the head and the arms.

The important point for this discussion is the sentence: "*pero e ditto mezo, perzo ch'ello sta in mezo de la persona*": "It is called "*mezo*" because it stays in the middle of the body" (*persona* = person as in "weapons were found on his person"). If we compare this to the implied *tutta* variant, the sword is clearly held to the left side, and the text reads:

*Questo sie dente di zengiaro por che dello zengiaro prende lo modo di ferire. Ello tra grande punte per sotto man in fin al volto e no si move di passo e torna cum lo fendente zò per li brazzi. E alchuna volta tra' la punta al volto e va cum la punta erta, e in quello zitar di punta ello acresse lo pe' ch'è dinanzi subito e torna cum lo fendente per la testa e per gli brazzi e torna in sua guardia e subito zitta un'aötra punta cum acresser di pe' e ben se defende delo zogho stretto.*

This is *dente de zengiaro* (tooth of the wild boar) because from the boar it takes its method of striking. It makes great underhand thrusts and at the end to the face and it does not pass forward; it returns with *fendente*, for example to the arms. It also makes the thrust to the face and goes with the point high, in which striking with the point it advances the right foot quickly, and returns with a *fendente* to the head and to the arms, and returns to its guard, and immediately makes another thrust with an advance of the foot, and it defends well against close quarters.

This appears to be conclusive; the guards with the same name are obviously related, having similar defences and tactical properties. When the weapon is held in the middle of the body (which with a short weapon places the point in line, with a long one places the point out of line) it is further defined as '*meza*' or '*mezano*' (the text accompanying *zengiaro la mezana* uses both terms, so they are probably effectively synonymous in this context). When the weapon is held to the side, it is '*tutta*'.

The apparent oddity of the spear guard, which looks much like the *tutta porta di ferro* with a sword, but is called *mezana*, is cleared up when we consider the length of the weapon; there is no way to sensibly hold the spear pointing down the centreline in the middle of the body with the point down; you would have to hold it by the butt. So to hold the spear in the middle of the body, it must be held cross-wise, and by the middle of the weapon.

There is one place in which there is an apparent contradiction; in the *zengiaro* guard of the pollaxe, as shown on page 35 verso. As discussed in my Introduction to *Fiore Battaglia* article, in contradiction to the text it is not *porta di ferro mezana* but *dente di zengiaro*.<sup>2</sup> As this guard

<sup>2</sup>The text begins "*Si posta di donna a mi porta di ferro mezana e contraria*" (If *posta di donna*, to me *porta di ferro mezana* is a counter...)(page 35 verso) which suggests that this picture is of *porta di ferro mezana*. However, it continues to describe what would happen with a sword in hand. The text above the preceding picture, of *posta di donna*, reads "*Posta di donna son contra dente zengiaro, quello mi aspetta uno grande colpo gli voglio fare*" (*Posta di donna* I am against *dente zengiaro*, who expects from me a great blow that I want to make). This suggests that the position

(*zengiario*) is only ever qualified by the term *mezana*, we may assume that this version is by default, and in concordance with comparison to the same guard in the sword section, the *tutta* variant.

## The *volte*; turning in circles

The distinction between "*meza volta*" and "*tuta volta*" is crucial. Are they the half turn and full turn?

The *meza volta* is clearly described: "*Meza volta si e quando uno fa un passo o inanzi o in dredo/ e chossi po zugare de laltra parte de-nanzi e di dredo.*" (*Meza volta* is when one makes a pass forwards or backwards, and so can play on the other side in front and behind.) This seems pretty clear; passing forwards or backwards, which changes the lead foot and hence the side of the body on which you can "play", is a "half turn".

One might expect that the *tutta volta*, or "whole turn" is double the size of the "half turn". However, its description gives no indication of the length of the step: "*Tutta volta sie quando uno va intorno uno pe con laltro pe/ luno staga fermo e laltro lo circonda.*" (*Tutta volta* is when one goes turning one foot around the other foot, one stays firm, and the other circles around it.) This describes a different mechanical action to the pass; it is simply any time that one foot turns around the other. If we compare this with Vadi's description of the feet (Folio 15 recto)

Right foot:

*Tu vedi el sol che fa gran giramento*

*E donde el nasce fa suo tornamento*

*El pé com el sol va convien che torni*

*Se voii chel giuco toa persona adorni*

You see the sun that makes great turns

And he returns where he was born

The foot like the sun should come back

If you want your person to be adorned by the play

*El pié stanco ferma senza paura*

*Como rocha fa che sia costante*

*E poii la tua persona serà tuta sicura*

The left foot without fear is still

Be sure it is as stable as a rock

And then your whole person will be sure (Porzio, Mele page 88)

we again get a sense of circular stepping actions, forwards and backwards, with one foot fixed and the other turning around it.

As far as I can tell, Fiore does not refer to the *tutta volta* again in the treatise, and the *meza volta* only once (on page 37r where it refers to an action done with a pollax), though *passare* and *tornare* are extensively employed. In the absence of any illustrations, and due to their apparently solely abstract usefulness, I am lead to believe that the turns are not "half" and "whole" in terms of how far they travel, but in how truly circular they are. In a half turn, the body does shift from one side to the other, and so turns, but the centre of mass moves in a straight line. When turning one foot around the other and pivoting on the ball of the supporting foot, as in a *tutta volta*, the centre of mass travels in a curve (see *The Swordsman's Companion*, page 62 for a brief discussion of the difference between linear and circular actions). This may be the distinction that Fiore is trying to draw.

So what then are the three turns of the sword? Unfortunately, this is the only place in the entire book

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opposite is *dente zengiario*. Given that this position is closer to *zengiario* with the sword and with the lance, than it is to *mezana porta di ferro* with either weapon, I choose to follow the text of the preceding illustration when naming this guard. Hence, it is *dente di zengiario*, not *porta di ferro mezana*. Cross-reference with the Pisani Dossi manuscript confirms this; the same guard, in the same place, is called *dente de zengiario*.

where Fiore uses these terms to describe movements of the sword. It is not possible, as far as I can see, to come to an unassailable opinion on what is meant by them. He does several times instruct us to make a turn to our swords (e.g. page 27 verso) but does not qualify *volta*. One final point before moving on: I believe these distinctions are not directly related to the term *mezzo tempo* as used by Vadi, where it apparently describes any action where you strike your opponent's blade and his person in the same action. This is a description of tempo as it relates to your opponent's actions, and not necessarily determined by the length or nature of your own movement. Fiore does refer to a "*volta tonda*" (round turn) three times (twice on page 30v, once on page 38r), which is not defined anywhere, but analysis of the plays may yield a useful definition.

### **Holding the weapon and crossing swords:**

Page 46 recto begins with an illustration of three companions on horseback preparing to kill a master on foot. The text reads:

*Qui sono tre compagni che voleno alcider questo magistro. Lo primo lo vole ferir sotto man che porta sua lanza a meza lanza. L'altro porta sua lanza restada a tutta lanza. Lo terzo lo vole alanzare cum sua lanza. e si e di patto che nissuno non debia fare piu d'un colpo per homo. Anchora debano fare a uno a uno.*

Here are three companions that wish to kill this master. The first wishes to strike underhand, as he carries his lance *a meza lanza*. The other carries his lance at rest *a tutta lanza*. The third wishes to throw his lance. And it is agreed that none should make more than one blow per man. Also they should act one by one.

The illustration makes it clear that to hold a lance *a meza lanza* means to hold it by the middle, and to do so *a tutta lanza* is to hold it by the (butt) end. (*Restada* refers to the lance resting on the lance rest attached to the mounted man's armour.) It is possible that this is because when held by the end, the whole lance is extended forward, whereas when held by the middle, only half the lance is in play. Earlier on, in an illustration of a sword guard, the text specifies (p22 verso) *io tegno la spada con la man manca al mezo* I hold the sword with the left hand at the half (i.e in the middle). This is a clear and unambiguous use of *mezo*, which suggests that it may be the primary distinction; because weapons may be held by the middle, it becomes necessary to distinguish when they may be held by the end; *tutta* is a natural counterpart to *meza*.

The crossings of the sword are also defined in these terms. In the Getty, it occurs only once, on page 25 verso, *Anchora me incroso qui por zogho largo a meza spada* ("Again I cross (the sword) here for *zogho largo* at the middle of the sword"). *Meza* again is clearly simply referring to the point of contact between the blades. It was preceded on page 25 recto by a different crossing point, at the tips of the swords. The text reads:

*Qui cominza zogho di spada a doy man zogho largo. Questo magistro ch'è qui incrosado cum questo zugadore in punta de spada dise: quando io son incrosado in punta de spada subito io do volta ala mia spadae si lo fiero da l'altra parte cum lo fendente zo per la testa e per gli brazi, overo che gli metto una punta in lo volto, come vederi qui dredo depinto.*

Here begins the play of the sword of two hands 'wide play'. This master who is crossed with this player at the tip of the sword says: when I am crossed at the tip of the sword immediately I give a turn to my sword so I strike from the other side with a descending blow for example to the head and

to the arms, or else I place a thrust in the face, as you see depicted hereafter.

For the purposes of this discussion, the important point is the use of the term *in punta di spada* in contrast to *meza*.

If we turn to the Pierpont Morgan version of the treatise, we find in the mounted combat section a pair of swordsmen engaged with the swords crossed near the hilt. The accompanying text reads:

*Quista doi magista sono aq incrosadi a tuta spada. Ezoche po far uno po far l'altro zoe che po fare tuti zoghi de spada cham lo incrosar. Ma lo incrosar sia de tre rasone, Zoe a tuta spada e punta de spada. Echi e incrosado a tuta spada pocho gle po starre. Echie mezo ?sado? a meza spada meno gle po stare. Echi a punta de spada niente gle po stare. Si che la spada si ha in si tre cose. zoe pocho, meno e niente.*

These two masters are here crossed *a tuta spada*. And what one can do the other can do, thus they can do all the plays of the sword from the crossing. But the crossing is of three types, thus *a tuta spada* and at *punta de spada*. And the crossing *a tuta spada* little can it withstand. And *mezo sado* less can it withstand. And *a punta de spada* nothing can it withstand. And so the sword has in it three things, thus: little, less and nothing.

So here again we see *tuta* and *meza* compared, in a similar way to when they were used to describe the grip on the lance. *Meza* and *punta* is clear, but why *tutta*? The crossing clearly does not occupy the whole of the sword; but it does leave the whole of the blade free to move.

On page 46 verso of the Getty, when the master chases the ribald back to the fortress, he describes his riding as "*corando a tutta brena*" which appears to mean "riding at full rein" (as in "I gave full rein to my baser instincts"), hence, leaving the reins slack so the horse will not be constrained. This suggests to me that the *incrosada* at "*tuta spada*" may indeed be translated as "full sword" as it does give the whole blade freedom to move. And in turn, if we feed this idea back into the guards, the "*tutta*" variant always seems to leave the entirety of the weapon on one side of the body, so the cover is made with the whole of the weapon moving through the centre; and the *tutta volta* similarly makes the whole body turn around a point that is beside the centre of mass, not within it.

## Blows and locks

"*Mezano*" and is also used to qualify the blows (*fendente, mezano, sottano*), and the *ligadure* (basically joint locks, which are *soprana, mezana, and sottana*). In both these cases, *mezana* is clearly "middle", as it comes between high and low in the case of the *ligadure*, and between descending, literally "ploughing" blows, and blows "from below". That the *ligadura soprana* would these days be called a "half nelson" is I think unrelated.

## Conclusion

So, with all that behind us, I feel confident in translating *meza* as "half", when referring to the *volta*, "middle" when referring to the sword crossing, blows and locks. When referring to the grip on the sword (as in *cum la mia man stanca piglio mia spada al mezo* p.35v) it is reasonable to translate *meza* as "middle" thus "I grab my sword by the middle with my left hand", though we might also describe that grip as "half sword". *Tutta* may be rendered as "full" in all cases.

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