Some Notes on Parrying Daggers and Poniards

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IN THE HISTORY OF EUROPEAN FENCING, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were as important as they were in most other fields of arms history. During that period European fencing schools, developing ancient traditions of personal combat with sword accompanied by a shield, worked out a kind of double fencing wherein both hands were armed with edged weapons and played an active part in offense and defense. An excellent exercise for body and mind, this most complicated form of fencing, requiring an assiduous training and great skill, cast a sort of spell over contemporaries by its mysterious passes and combinations, infinite variety of technical ways, and elaborate motor coordination of hands and feet. The perfecting of weapons and swordplay technique finally led to the elaboration of the single-sword fencing methods that, in turn, laid the foundations for modern fencing. But this development took one and a half centuries, and during this period the sword-and-dagger form of personal combat dominated in western Europe.

The progress of double fencing and the ultimate results of this development would have been impossible without modifications of the weapons used, including those usually called left-hand daggers, which are the main subject of these notes. As a fencer, I have always been interested in these fascinating weapons, and this interest was given an additional impulse when I was granted an opportunity to study the excellent array of arms and rare fencing books in the collections of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

To begin, I shall cite the authors whose works on arms and fencing enlarged my knowledge and impelled me, in a way, to write these notes.[1]

Lep[ido]. Circa al tenerlo [pugnale] in mano, come uolete, uoi che si tenga?

Gio[vanni]. Quasi di piatto facendo che'l fil dritto di esso guardi alquanto uerso le pari destre: perche hauerete il nodo della mano piu libero da potere spinger in fuori la spada del nimico, & massimanente la punta: oltra che hauerete maggior forza nel parare per testa, per esser sostenuto il pugnale dal dito grosso: & di piu il tenerlo come ho detto, fa che l'elzo di esso uiene a fare maggior difesa.

Giovanni dall'Agocchie, *Dell'arte di scrimia*, 1572.[2]

The earliest picture of a swordsman fencing simultaneously with sword and dagger seems to be an illus-

1. Egerton Castle, *Schools and Masters of Fence* (London, 1969), reprint by Arms and Armour Press. Bashford Dean, *Catalogue of European Daggers* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1929). H. L. Peterson, *Daggers and Fighting Knives of the Western World* (London, 1968). H. Seitz, *Blankwaffen* (Braunschweig, 1968). A. Wise, *The Art and History of Personal Combat* (Greenwich, Connecticut, 1972.)

2. G. dall'Agocchie, *Dell'arte di scrimia* (Venetia, 1572) ff. 35 verso–36: "Lep[ido Ranieri]: As for holding it [the dagger] in hand, how do you want it to be held? Gio[vanni dall'Agocchie]: Almost flatly [vs. enemy], directing its right edge toward the right side; in this way you will have the palm freer to beat off the enemy's sword outward, especially its point; besides, having propped up the dagger [blade] with your thumb, you will have more strength in parrying above the head; and moreover, holding it as I have just said, the dagger hilt [guard] will give a better protection."

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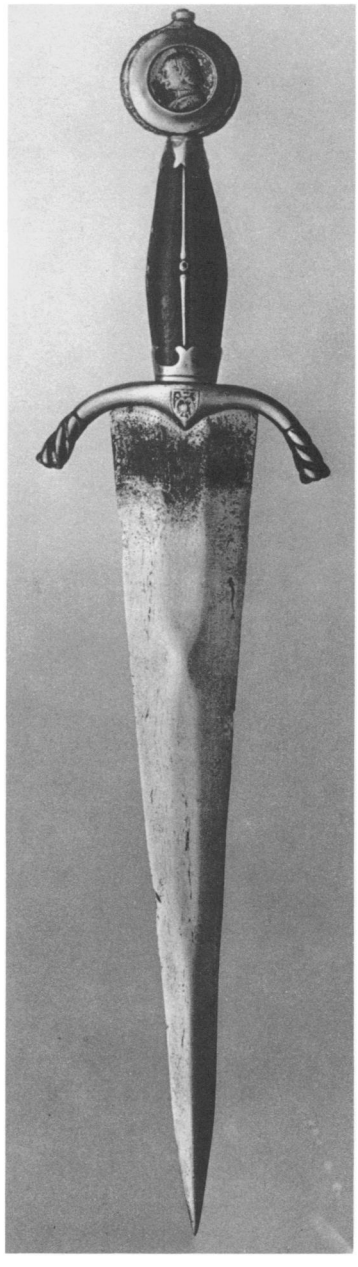


FIGURE 1
Dagger with arched crossguard (daghetta of cinquedea type). Italian, about 1500. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Collection of Giovanni P. Morisini, presented by his daughter Giulia, 1932, 32.75.97. Such daggers, lacking a side ring, could give but limited protection to the holding fingers

tration in Talhoffer's *Fechtbuch*, dated 1467.[3] The fencer is represented here in a difficult situation, facing two opponents. Against one of them he fights with his sword, defending himself from the other with his dagger (*Dolch*) and small buckler held together in his left hand. The fencing master's concept is that in such occurrence the dagger must be held like a knife, the thumb at the pommel, the same hand somehow also gripping the buckler handle. This method can hardly be regarded as practical, since, first of all, it almost forbids any offensive actions with the dagger, and, second, a hard sword blow on this parrying contrivance, particularly on the dagger blade, could easily knock out both dagger and shield. Thus, the situation depicted here seems to be farfetched, reflecting perhaps the teacher's intention to demonstrate his inventiveness and personal technical virtuosity to his students. Anyway, this scene clearly shows an interest in using the dagger as an active auxiliary weapon accompanying the sword. Talhoffer's manual also proves that ideas about sword-and-dagger fencing were taking shape as early as the third quarter of the fifteenth century. The dagger and shield combination recommended in the book evidently points to the absence in the dagger of any effective protection for the hand, that is, of a special guard that would later become the most distinctive feature of the parrying dagger.

In his narrative about the duel between Pierre Terrail, seigneur de Bayard, and Alonzo de Soto-Mayor, which took place in Naples in 1499, Brantôme (about 1540–1614) writes that *estoc* and *poignard* were chosen for the occasion.[4] It cannot be deduced with certainty from Brantôme's account that both weapons were simultaneously used by the fighters. Most probably, the poniards were included in their armament as reserve weapons, to be used whenever convenient, for a poniard was employed by Bayard in the finale of the duel only and in a very traditional way, namely, to force his thrown-down opponent to surrender.

An unquestionable proof of an active use of the dagger with another edged weapon is to be found in Albrecht Dürer's *Fechtbuch* (1512), which shows a fighter armed with malchus and dagger.[5] In two episodes, the fencer holds the dagger like a knife; in the third scene the dagger is gripped in the mode that came to be accepted as more sensible in handling parrying weapons, well illustrated by later sources. Dürer's drawings, while reflecting a period of experiments in the use of the dagger in swordplay, are evidence that not later than the first decade of the sixteenth century this

3. *Talhoffers Fechtbuch aus dem Jahre 1467*, ed. G. Hergsell (Prague, 1887) pl. 240.

4. P. de Bourdeille, seigneur de Brantôme, *Mémoires . . . touchant les duels* (Leyden, 1722) pp. 38–40.

5. "Albrecht Dürers Fechtbuch," *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des Allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses*, XXVII, 6 (Vienna-Leipzig, 1910) pl. 64, figs. 38–40.

method began coming into use. But for this new mode to become universally practiced, as it was throughout the sword-and-dagger era, one essential step was necessary in the development of the dagger as parrying weapon, namely, the designing of a protective device for the holding hand. Dagger guards then in existence either were unhandy for proper parrying use or could not preserve the wrist sufficiently well from various concussions and cuts while repulsing the sword blade. Even the crossguard dagger (Figure 1) was fit to stop the sword and protect the hand only if the fencer had mastered a parrying technique that directed one of the quillons toward the opponent's blade (Figure 2). However, this mode has several disadvantages, since it considerably lessens both an important function of the thumb, propping up the dagger blade, and the gripping power of the hand, enabling the opposing sword to knock out the dagger by a strong blow on a quillon or on the edge of the blade. These and similar practical observations could not escape attention when fencers began initial experiments with sword-and-dagger fighting, and an urgent necessity to contrive a special guard for the hand was surely realized as soon as daggers started their very first performances as parrying weapons, and not, as has sometimes been said, decades later.[6]

FIGURE 2
A method of high quarte parry, protecting inside lines, with the dagger of Figure 1

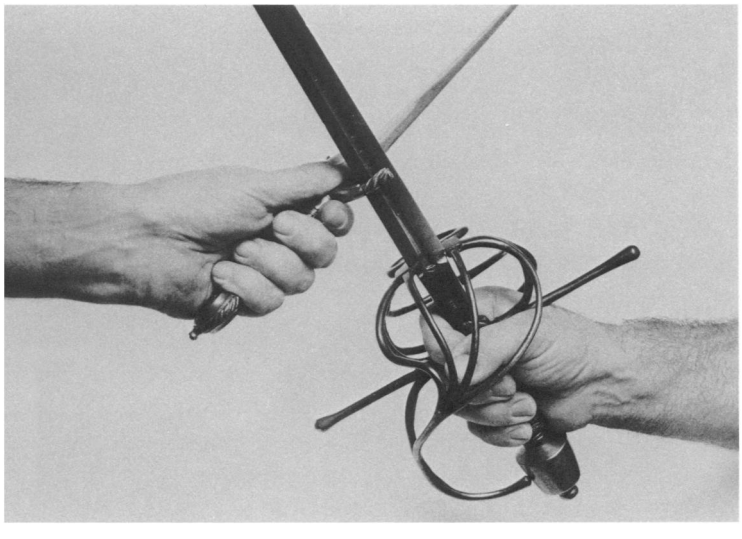


FIGURE 3
Landsknecht parrying dagger. Swiss or French (?), early 16th century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Jean Jacques Reubell, 1926, in memory of his mother, Julia C. Coster, and of his wife, Adeline E. Post, both of New York City, 26.145.43

Looking at early sixteenth-century daggers from the point of view of their suitability for double fencing, it can be seen that just at this time various modifications of the dagger guards evolved in one definite direction, that is, to afford better protection of the hand when it grips with the thumb on the heel of the blade. Signs of such a development are to be found, for instance, in a group of Landsknecht daggers whose guards appear as though cut off in half, the internal part of the horizontal S- or 8-shaped guard being removed (Figure 3). If not yet ideal in design, this form allows proper parrying actions while protecting, more or less, the wrist, especially when such a guard is supplemented by a crosspiece, even a short one (Figure 4), though this is

6. It is not uncommon to read in the arms literature that "left-hand" (that is, parrying) daggers came into being in the middle of the sixteenth century or were fully developed at some time in the next century. In this context I recall what took place during the filming of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in Yalta in 1954. Some threescore student actors who had studied historical fencing in Moscow institutes were to take part in the fighting scenes, playing with swords and daggers. After only two rehearsals, there was hardly one among the company without finger wounds, all of the same kind. When I was invited in to advise, I discovered that none of the daggers had side rings. Side rings were made and welded onto the crossguard daggers, after which the fighting was staged without further trouble.

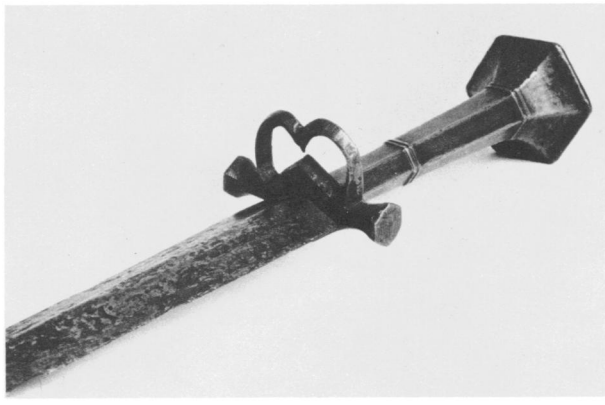


FIGURE 4
Landsknecht parrying dagger. Swiss or French (?), about 1510–20. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Jean Jacques Reubell, 1926, in memory of his mother, Julia C. Coster, and of his wife, Adeline E. Post, both of New York City, 26.145.40

generally less important in parrying weapons than a side ring.[7] A Landsknecht roundel-hilt dagger in an early sixteenth-century German painting (Figure 5) seems to have been modified in the same way. Here, too, the rear part of the guard appears cut off so as to provide a better grip when the dagger is in use as a parrying weapon.

Important evidence from the early period of sword-and-dagger fencing can be found in the dueling code first published in 1521 by Paris de Puteo, an Italian connoisseur of dueling customs and conventions. Discussing the selection of weapons for a combat, Puteo relates a case of "two gentlemen who came to Italy from north of the Alps to combat without armor, only with swords and daggers."[8] The author is preoccupied, in this passage, with the duelists' decision to fight without any body protection, which was not yet a common practice, therefore he makes only a casual mention of their offensive weapons. It is very significant, at this point, that he uses the expression *con spada e pugnale*, which is well known from a multitude of later sources as a standard idiom to designate sword-and-dagger fencing. This passage, taken together with Dürer's drawings and contemporary daggers fit for parrying actions, suggests that the new fencing methods were in use in the second decade of the sixteenth century, though without the universal adoption known later under the combined influence of Italian fencing schools, the dueling fashion, and the sportive attractiveness of double fencing itself. If the interpretation of these data is correct, it must be emphasized as well that by the 1520s sword-and-dagger fencing was practiced in a country adjacent to Italy, most probably in Germany, where various forms of fencing had long since been elaborated by professional masters from the Fraternity of St. Mark. It would be difficult, however, to affirm flatly that specially designed parrying daggers first appeared in Germany, although attempts had been made there to adjust some traditional dagger forms to the new use. At this period, the leading role in the development of swordplay belonged, above all, to Italian schools that were actively shaping new fencing methods. It is hardly

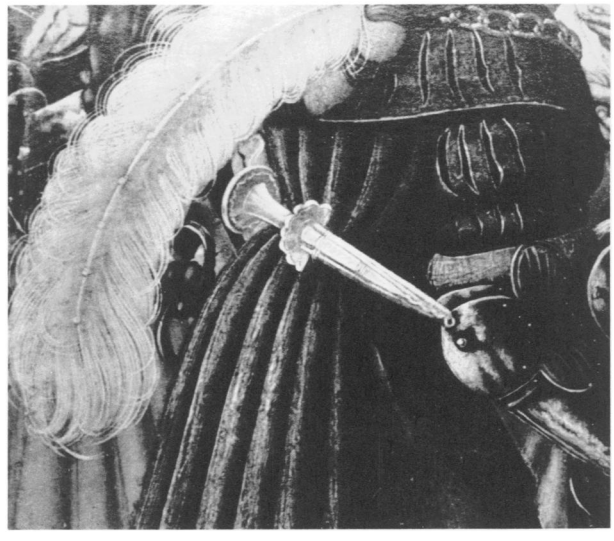


FIGURE 5
Detail of painting, Landsknechts, White and Moorish. German school, about 1510. Formerly Eugene Bolton Collection, London

7. Nine more Landsknecht daggers of about 1500–25 in the Metropolitan Museum belong to the same typological group and can be considered as prototypes of true parrying weapons (nos. 26.145.26, 35–41, 43).

8. Paris de Puteo, *Duello* (Venice, 1525, 3d edition) f.G [VI]: "et accade che uenendo in Italia doi Caualieri oltramontani per combatere desarmati solo con spate et pugnali."

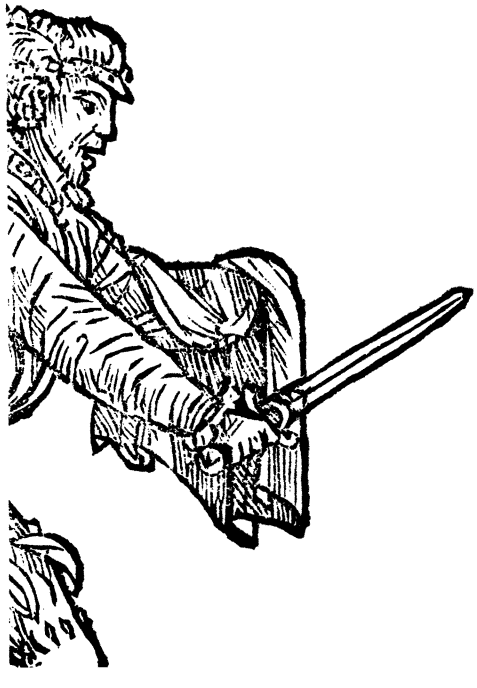
astonishing, therefore, that a completely formed type of parrying dagger was first shown in a treatise published in 1536 by a renowned Bolognese fencing master, Achille Marozzo.[9]

In the chapter that gives the earliest known description of sword-and-dagger fencing, Marozzo recommends that one parry with a weapon he calls *pugnale bolognese* (Figures 6, 7).[10] This dagger has a large edged blade intended for cut-and-thrust, a well-developed crossguard, and a massive side ring—that is, all parts necessary for effective parrying functions. A specific element in this type of dagger is the form of flat crossguard strongly curved toward the side ring, giving additional protection to the wrist from a more vulnerable side.

The Bolognese school played a most important part in the development of European fencing at least from the early sixteenth century, and it seems highly probable that the term *pugnale bolognese* simply reflects the place of origin and introduction of this particular form. According to a Bolognese chronicle, Achille Marozzo was born in 1484 and began to work on his book in 1516,[11] presumably having by this time considerable experience as fencer and teacher. The methods of the sword-and-dagger fight being elaborated just at this period, probably with the active participation of Marozzo himself and his own teachers, Bolognese masters and swordsmiths must have designed the proper parry-

FIGURE 6
Woodcut in Marozzo's *Opera nova*, 1536 edition, f. 15. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Thomas J. Watson Library, Gift of William H. Riggs, 1913. Marozzo discusses methods of fighting with sword and pugnale bolognese. The laterally curved quillons of the dagger protect the fingers better

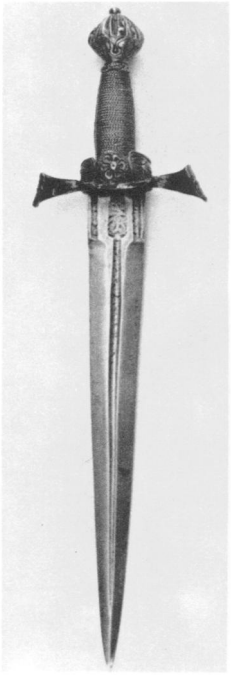
FIGURE 7
Woodcut in Marozzo's *Opera nova*, f. 19 verso, showing the pugnale bolognese employed in dagger-and-cloak fight. This is the earliest representation of a parrying dagger with guard formed by side ring and curved quillons



9. A. Marozzo, *Opera nova* (Modena, Antonio Bergola, 1536), copy in the Metropolitan Museum. J. Gelli, in his *Bibliografia generale della scherma* (Milan, 1895) pp. 130–138, wrote of a claimed discovery by F. Tribolati in the Biblioteca dell'Università di Pisa of a much earlier copy, published in 1517. Relying on information received, Gelli described this copy as a unique. His assertion was repeated by C. A. Thimm in his *Complete Bibliography of Fencing and Duelling* (London, 1896) p. 181. When I examined a microfilm of the book discovered by Tribolati, I could see that the original date in the colophon, MDLXVII, had been altered somewhat by a scratching out of the L. The 1567 edition is very close to the 1536 edition in both text and illustration, but their layouts differ slightly. Since there are omissions concerning this book in standard bibliographies, I list the editions known to me: Modena, A. Bergola, 1536. Modena (?), about 1540 (copy in the Department of Prints and Photographs, Metropolitan Museum). Venice, G. Padovano—M. Stessa, 1550. Venice, Heredi di M. Stessa, 1567 (copy in Library, University of Pisa). Venice, A. Pinargenti, 1568. Corrected and newly illustrated, retitled *Arte dell'armi*, Venice, A. Pinargenti, 1568. Verona, 1615.

10. Marozzo, ff. 15, 19.

11. Gelli, *Bibliografia*, p. 134.



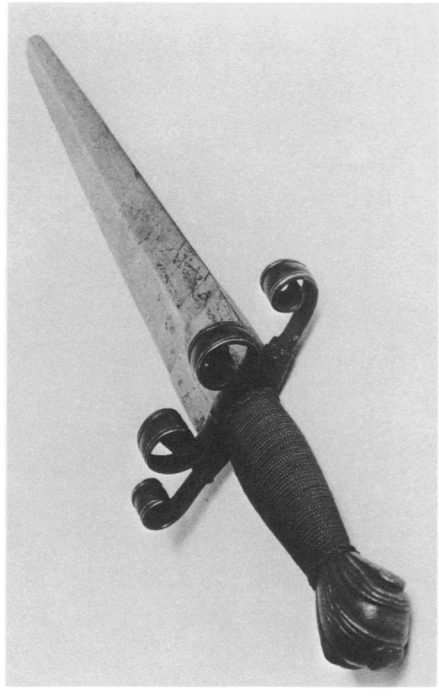


FIGURE 8
Parrying dagger, Bolognese type. North Italian, about 1530–40. René Géroudet Collection, Geneva

FIGURE 9
Parrying dagger, variant of Bolognese type. Italian, about 1530–50. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 04.3.125

FIGURE 10
Parrying dagger, Bolognese type. North Italian, about 1540–60. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Jean Jacques Reubell, 1933, in memory of his mother, Julia C. Coster, 34.57.22

ing weapon recorded in Marozzo's book. The principle of the side ring for hand protection was anything but new by this time, for it was present on some types of sword from the first half of the fifteenth century[12] and thus could have been well known to Bolognese masters. Thanks to its famous university, Bologna was an international academic center, and doubtless many of the students took lessons with local masters, afterward taking the new swordplay to different parts of Europe, not to say of Italy itself. No less assiduous as students and proselytizers for the Bolognese school, surely, were soldiers from Germany, Spain, France, and Switzerland: participants in the Italian wars in the first quarter of the sixteenth century. In one of his stories, Brantôme gives a detailed account of a duel fought by two Spanish officers, Azevedo and Saint-Croix (Santa-Cruz, evidently), in early 1510s, at Ferrara (about 25 miles from Bologna). For this combat, the duelists chose "rapières bien tranchantes" and "poignards." Azevedo began fighting with both weapons in hand, but Saint-Croix sheathed his dagger and preferred to fight with his rapier only. Perhaps he simply was not trained in the then new technique. Whatever the case, Azevedo proved to have an advantage and, being the more skillful, he won the duel.[13]

A remarkable feature of the Bolognese dagger, the flat crossguard strongly curved toward the side ring, is to be found on an excellent parrying dagger in the René Géroudet Collection (Figure 8); this stays very

12. R. Ewart Oakeshott, *The Sword in the Age of Chivalry* (London, 1964) pp. 69, 70, 120, pl. 43A.

13. Brantôme, pp. 27–34.

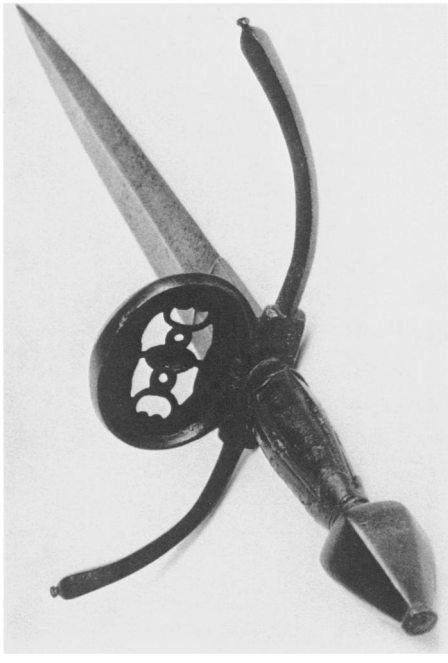
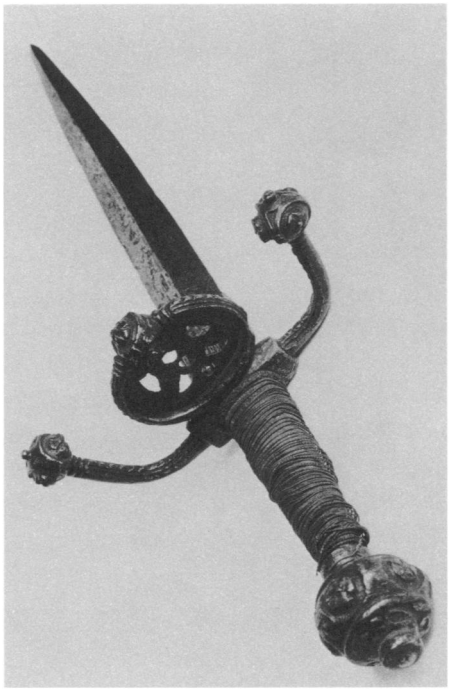


FIGURE 11
Parrying dagger, Bolognese type. Italian, about 1550–70. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Jean Jacques Reubell, 1933, in memory of his mother, Julia C. Coster, 34.57.21



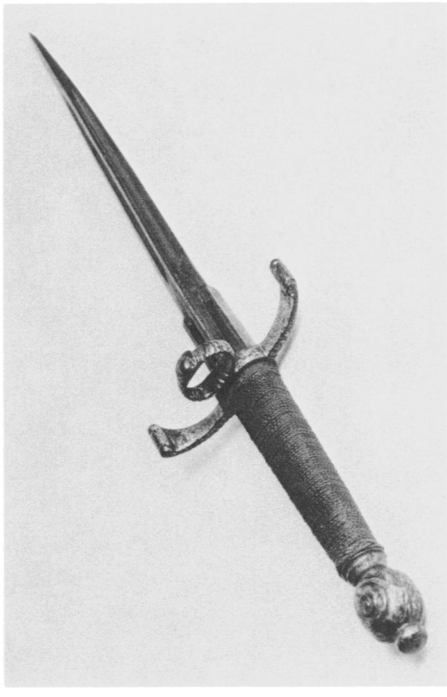


FIGURE 12
Parrying dagger, Bolognese type. North Italian, mid-16th century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Jean Jacques Reubell, 1926, in memory of his mother, Julia C. Coster, and of his wife, Adeline E. Post, both of New York City, 26.145.100

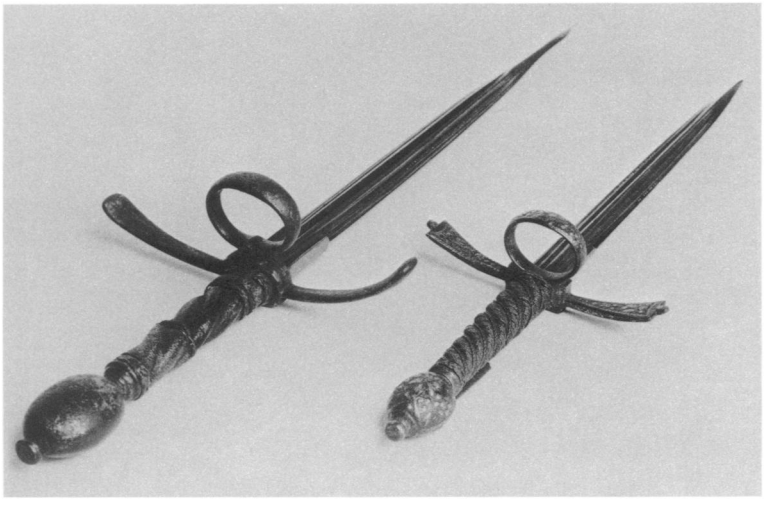


FIGURE 13
Parrying poniard, Bolognese type. North Italian, third quarter 16th century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Jean Jacques Reubell, 1926, in memory of his mother, Julia C. Coster, and of his wife, Adeline E. Post, both of New York City, 26.145.117

FIGURE 14
Parrying poniards, Bolognese type. French or Italian, last quarter 16th century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Jean Jacques Reubell, 1926, in memory of his mother, Julia C. Coster, and of his wife, Adeline E. Post, both of New York City, 26.145.108 (left), 26.145.109 (right)

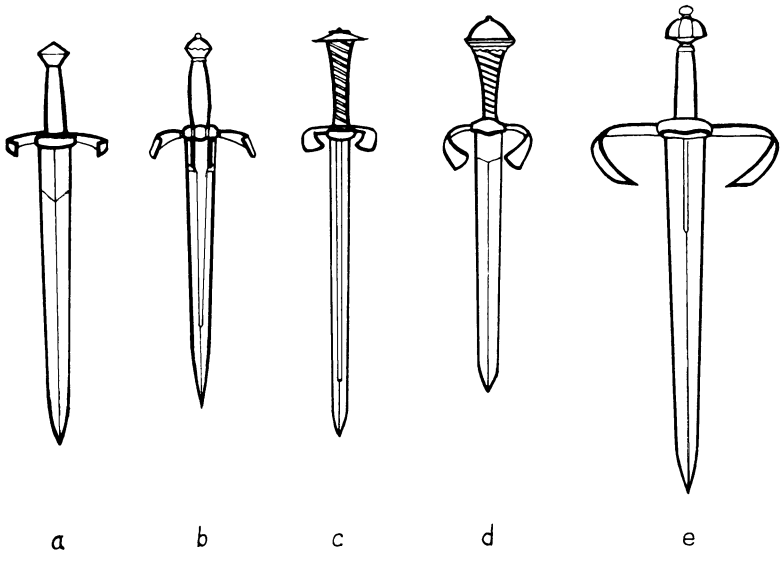


FIGURE 15
Modifications of the Bolognese type. a: Pugnale bolognese, about 1515–40, after Marozzo (compare Figures 6, 7). b: Italian, about 1530–40, René Géroudet Collection (see Figure 8). c: German, second quarter 16th century, after K. Ullmann, "Dolchmesser, Dolche und Kurzwehren des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts," *Waffen- und Kostümkunde*, 1961, II, figs. 29, 34. d: German, mid-16th century, Hungarian National Museum, Budapest, after K. János, *Régi magyar fegyverek* (Budapest, 1971) p. 116, fig. 201. e: German (Saxon), about 1600, Tower of London Armouries, no. X. 266, after A. R. Dufty, *European Swords and Daggers in the Tower of London* (London, 1974) pl. 25a

close to the pictures in Marozzo's book and may be considered one of the earliest known specimens of the type. In a heavier variant (Figure 9), the side-ring function is played by two massive scrolls; these probably protected fingers less effectively and so did not become very popular. The basic pattern of the Bolognese dagger was widely used during a long period, as seen by the number and dating of weapons extant (Figures 10–14), despite the fact that other types of parrying daggers and poniards were later developed in response to more sophisticated modes of double fencing. It is significant, in this respect, that the pugnale bolognese was still pic-

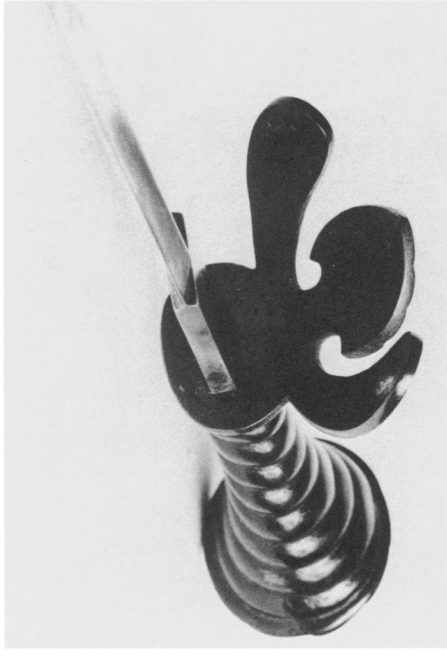


FIGURE 16
Landsknecht parrying dagger. German, about 1540–60. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Jean Jacques Reubell, 1926, in memory of his mother, Julia C. Coster, and of his wife, Adeline E. Post, both of New York City, 26.145.48

FIGURE 17
Landsknecht parrying dagger. German, mid-16th century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 04.3.140

tured in the late 1620s, in a treatise by a master of the Spanish school teaching in Flanders.[14]

The Bolognese dagger guard seems to have directly affected some changes that began taking place in German daggers early in the sixteenth century. This influence is manifest, in particular, in a peculiar shape of the crossguard, strongly bent outward, in certain Landsknecht daggers (Figure 15). Later, this form, clearly going back to the Bolognese type, found a graceful manneristic fancifulness and a general manly appearance in Saxon body-guard daggers (15 e).

The tendency to adjust earlier dagger types to practical requirements was mentioned in connection with the German daggers equipped with "halved" guards. A similar alteration of the guard, with the same purpose, seems to have been performed on some roundel daggers (Figure 5), whose abandonment, in their traditional form, during the first quarter of the sixteenth century apparently was not fortuitous but could be related to their ineffectiveness for parrying actions. At the same time, a half-guard version of the roundel dagger could play a part in the designing of Landsknecht parrying daggers provided with a sturdy shell guard, which served as a wrist-protecting device while deep cuts in the shell were contrived as casual traps for the parried sword blade (Figure 16). A variant type has the shell fully dismembered to form a small shield and two strongly arched quillons (Figure 17). The shell guard had been known by the end of the fifteenth century,[15] and its pattern may have suggested a guard for parrying daggers that could entangle the opponent's sword blade.

This process of adjustment of the edged weapons to the new swordplay style touched upon the "kidney" dagger as well. One of its later variants, with a very short but pronounced crossbar, probably became a prototype of German parrying daggers with side ring and stout crossguard slightly bent toward the point and terminated by globular finials (Figure 18).

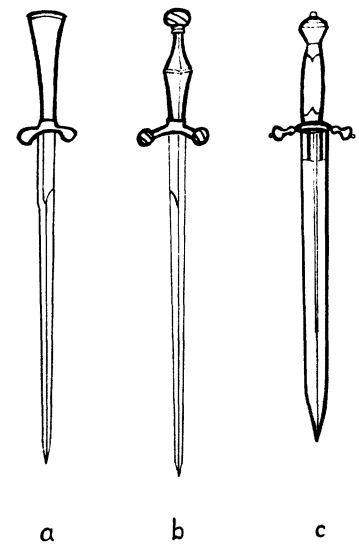


FIGURE 18
Modifications of the "kidney-dagger" guard. a: Flemish (?), about 1460–1500, after G. F. Laking, *A Record of European Armour and Arms through Seven Centuries*, III (London, 1920) p. 39, figs. 808, 809. b: German, early 16th century, Metropolitan Museum 26.145.71. c: German (Saxon), by W. Paller (d. 1583), about 1560–70, Metropolitan Museum 29.158.662

Parrying daggers and poniards with vertically S-shaped crossguards remained in use till the middle of the seventeenth century. They go back to an early stage in swordplay history, as can be seen from illustrations in Marozzo's book.[16] Of two variations of the parrying dagger with side ring and S-crossguard, the more practical one would seem to be the type (Figure 19, left) which, when held in the left hand, faces the opponent with its quillon curved toward the blade. We will call this type A. In carrying out any parry that would meet the sword,[17] a fencer familiar with such a dagger could

14. Girard Thibault d'Anvers, *Académie de l'espée* (Leyden, 1628/30) II, pls. v, vi. Two slightly different versions of the Bolognese dagger guard are shown. One almost exactly follows the sharp forms of the guard in Marozzo's book, the other has more flowing, rounded contours. It may be noted that both the Bolognese dagger and its first promoter successfully passed the same time trial, Marozzo's work having been published at least seven times in eighty years.

15. A French dagger of about 1500 in the Wallace Collection, No. A 809 (J. Mann, *European Arms and Armour* [London, 1962] II, p. 404, pl. 138).

16. Marozzo, ff. 129, 133.

17. According to Giovanni di Grassi, *Raggione di adoprar sicuramente l'arme* (Venice, 1570) p. 36, the dagger should mainly protect the body's left side from the knee up, while the sword beats off strikes directed to the right side and to the left leg below the knee.

surely count on its upwardly curved quillon to stop the sliding sword blade and possibly to jam it, by a well-timed twist of the left hand (Figure 20). The type with S-crossguard shaped inversely, type B (Figure 19, center), does not look as handy. Such a dagger in the left hand, its quillon curved toward the fingers, finds itself in the forward position (Figure 21, left). Being too short, this quillon can in no way function as a knuckle-guard against cutting blows, and its shape is not reliable enough to stop the sword blade, which may easily slide over the rounded curve. To catch the enemy's sword with the rear quillon of his dagger, the fencer parrying, for instance in an outward line, would have to turn his hand clockwise while throwing his arm counterclockwise (Figure 21, center), then, at the shock, twist his hand once more but in opposite motion (Figure 21,

FIGURE 19

Left, parrying dagger, Italian, about 1560–80. Center, parrying poniard, Swiss (?), dated 1585. Right, parrying dagger, Italian or French, about 1560–70. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Jean Jacques Reubell, 1926, in memory of his mother, Julia C. Coster, and of his wife, Adeline E. Post, both of New York City, 25.145.92, 95, 90

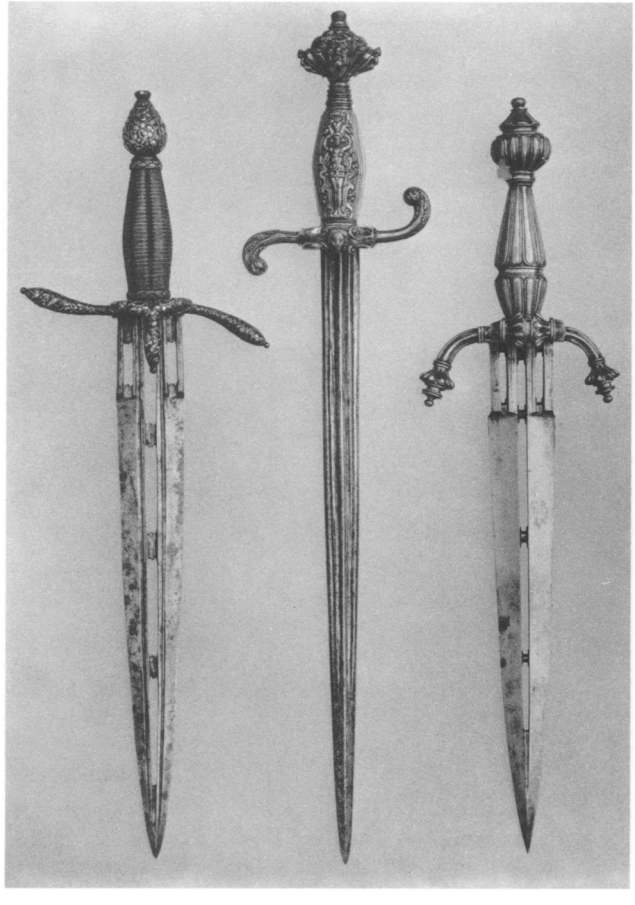
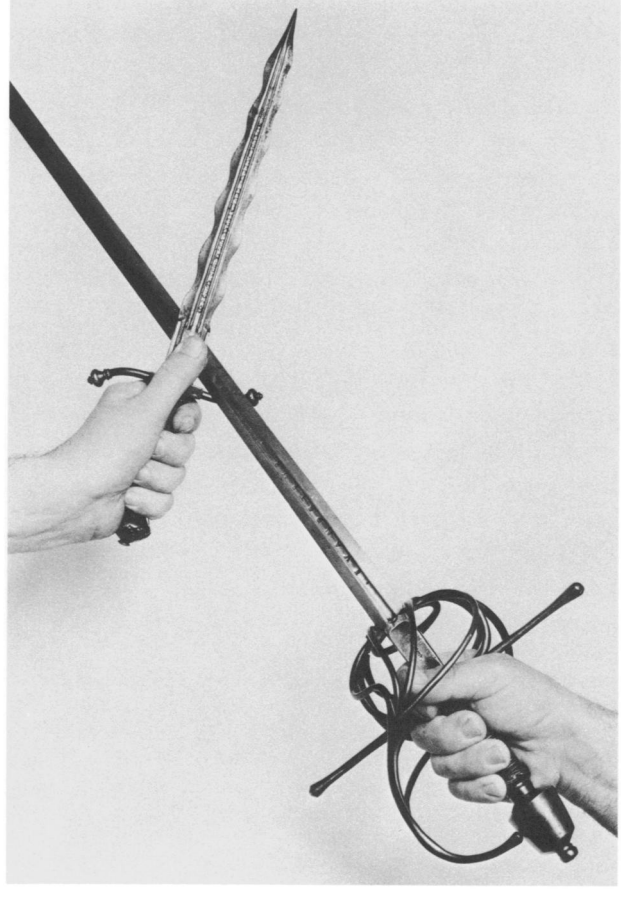


FIGURE 20

Tierce parry and trapping of rapier blade with S-crossguard parrying dagger (type A). This outward high parry requires simultaneous counterclockwise motions of both arm and hand, then a clockwise twist of the hand to jam the blade. Dagger, north Italian, about 1570–80. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Jean Jacques Reubell, 1926, in memory of his mother, Julia C. Coster, and of his wife, Adeline E. Post, both of New York City, 26.145.94



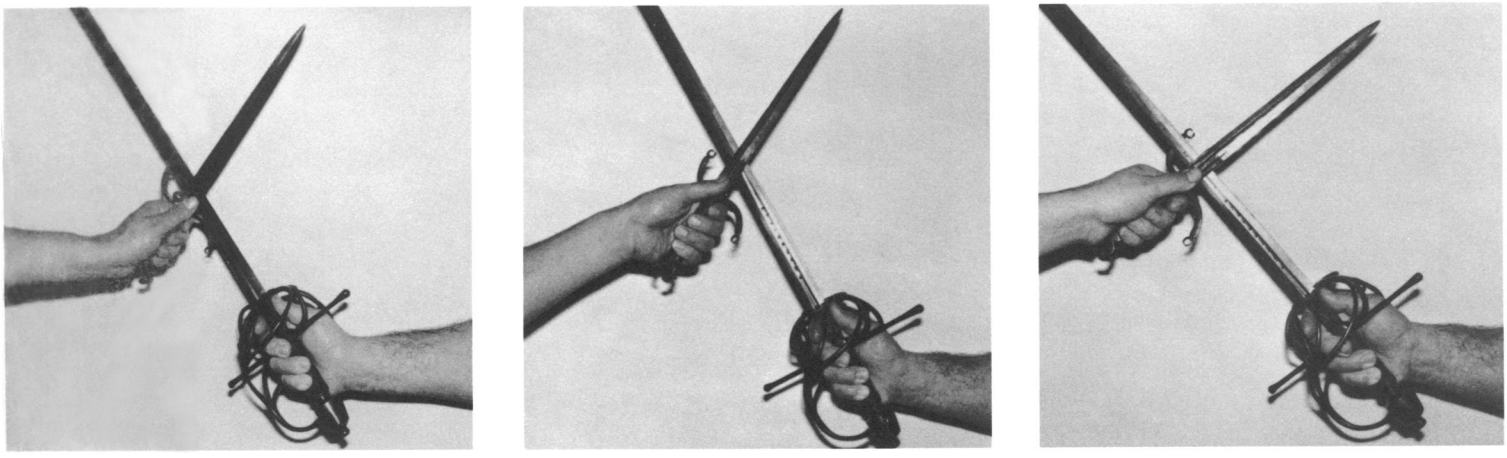
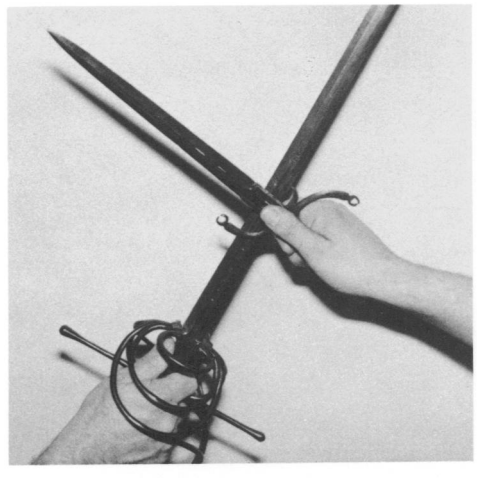


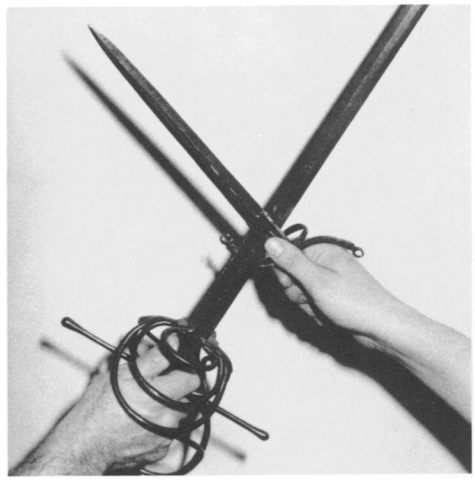
FIGURE 21

Tierce parry with S-crossguard parrying dagger (type B) in left hand. Left: parrying without trapping the blade, which is stopped by the side ring but can easily slide over the forward curve of the S-crossguard. Center and right: parrying and catching the blade with the rear end of the crossguard should require three hand movements: parry by counterclockwise arm motion with simultaneous clockwise hand turn (center), followed by counterclockwise hand twist to jam the blade (right). Dagger, north Italian, late 16th century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Jean Jacques Reubell, 1926, in memory of his mother, Julia C. Coster, and of his wife, Adeline E. Post, both of New York City, 26.145.93

FIGURE 22

Tierce parry with same dagger in right hand. Above: parry without trapping the blade. Below: parrying and trapping by simultaneous clockwise motions of arm and hand, and twist of the hand in opposite direction





right). These obvious inconveniences disappear, of course, should this type of dagger be used in the right hand (Figure 22).

These observations suggest that the variant type B with inverse S-crossguard was intended for left-handed swordsmen. The history of modern fencing shows an astonishingly high number of successful left-handed fencers, and they doubtless existed as well in past times. Left-handed swordsmen must have demanded partic-

In practice, however, the dagger might defend the right side when the sword performed a different action (R. Capo Ferro da Cagli, *Gran simulacro dell'arte e dell'uso della scerma* [Siena, 1610]). Basic instructions in all manuals were generally addressed to right-handers, the main dagger parries corresponding to the following positions: left side ("guardia di fuora"), *tierce* for high parry, *seconde* for low parry; right side ("guardia di dentro"), *high quarte* and *low quarte*. For left-handers, holding the dagger in the right hand, these positions and names had inverse meanings, the *tierce*, for instance, protecting the body's right side in upper lines.

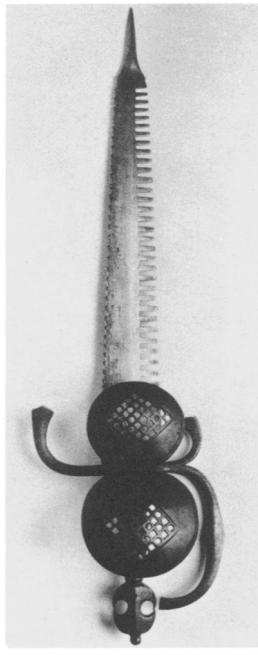
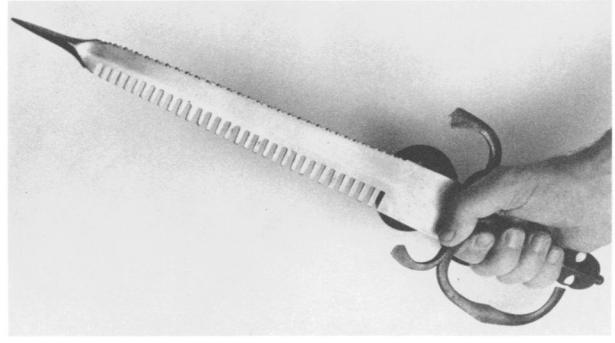


FIGURE 23
Parrying dagger, "sword-breaker," for right-hand use by left-handed swordsman. The traps are formed by the arched crossguard, smaller shield, and teeth of the blade. The serrate back edge prevents the opponent from seizing the dagger with his hand, even if it is gloved. Italian, about 1550–75. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of William H. Riggs, 1913, 14.25.1275

ular attention from sword- and dagger-makers exactly as did left-handed shooters, or marksmen aiming with the left eye, for whom special guns were made.[18] The presumed daggers of this type for left-handers are considerably fewer than those preserved for right-handers, the proportion, based mainly on specimens in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum and the Hermitage Museum, being about one to three.

In the woodcuts illustrating Marozzo's treatise there is a picture of a dagger with symmetrical arched crossguard whose ends are curved toward the point.[19] This form, traceable back to corresponding late medieval sword guards, became probably the most popular design in parrying weapons during Marozzo's lifetime (he died between 1550 and 1558).[20] The reason for this popularity, known from the comparatively large number of specimens extant and by numerous illustrations in fencing books, is closely connected with the development of the art of fencing by the mid-sixteenth century. Camillo Agrippa's treatise (1553)[21] shows that leading Italian teachers of the period, above all the author himself, rationalized actions performed with the sword and worked out a simpler and more practical system of basic positions ("guards"), which often resemble positions adopted by classical and modern fencing.[22] Experience and theoretical calculations led masters to conclude that the thrust required less time for preparation and execution than the cut, and let one score a hit from a greater distance. At this time the thrust was given at least an equal importance with the cut, but soon, from the third quarter of the century, the thrust increasingly prevailed, as attested by manuals of this period.[23] Along with the application and perfecting of these principles went the development of lighter swords,



their balance improved by decreasing the weight of the blade by reducing its mass but not its length. The rapier somewhat lost its cutting properties but gave the fencer, instead, more ease and speed in performing thrusts, feints, changes of position, and various combinations. As swordplay gradually became more subtle and complicated, with hits delivered more accurately, new modes of defense were contrived by fencers and swordsmiths. Rapier guards became more complicated, affording better protection for the hand, while artful traps were devised in bucklers to catch the thrusting blade. At the same period, parrying daggers were coming into use, with special contrivances designed to entangle the opponent's blade; the most sophisticated of these are now usually called "sword-breakers" (Figure 23).

18. L. Tarassuk, *Antique European and American Firearms at the Hermitage Museum* (Leningrad, 1972) nos. 213, 233.

19. Marozzo, f. 128. This woodcut, like those on ff. 129, 133, illustrating the use of dagger alone, shows the weapon in a position that makes it impossible to say whether the dagger had a side ring.

20. Egerton Castle, p. 35.

21. C. Agrippa, *Trattato di scientia d'arme* (Rome, 1553).

22. Egerton Castle, p. 45.

23. G. di Grassi. A. Viggiani, *Lo schermo* (Venice, 1575). Viggianni's treatise, actually completed in 1560, was the first to emphasize the superiority of the thrust over the cut.

It is surely not by chance that di Grassi's treatise (1570), which describes contemporary methods, pays great attention to sword-and-dagger fencing. It gives instructions in different ways of handling the dagger[24] and depicts, in particular, what may be called a parrying trap-dagger whose guard was provided with two steel prongs, directed along the blade and expressly intended to entangle the sword. The description of this weapon[25] calls to mind a dagger in the Walters Art Gallery (Figure 24) as well as a variant having one prong only (Figure 19, left). Di Grassi clearly dwelt on the trap-dagger because its original design was quite uncommon.

Daggers with symmetrical arched crossguards, first shown by Marozzo, proved to be the most practical parrying weapons as soon as this guard was supplemented by a side ring (Figures 25, 19 right). The ring, turned in the direction of the parry, protected the wrist well, and the quillons, curved toward the point, gave the hand an additional protection, stopping the blade in

24. G. di Grassi, pp. 36–49.

25. G. di Grassi, p. 39: "Altri sono a quali piace di tenir il pugnale con la faccia uerso l'inimico, seruendosi per difesa non solo del pugnale, ma delle quardie ancora di esso pugnale con le quali dicono che si fa presa d'una spada, & per cio fare piu facilmente, hanno i loro pugnali, i quali oltra l'else ordinarie, hanno ancora due alette di ferro lunghe quatro ditta diritte distanti dal pugnale la grossezza d'una corda d'arco, nellaiquale distanza quando auiene, che se gli cacci la spada inimica, essi subito uolgendo la mano stringono la spada facendo prese di essa."

FIGURE 24
Parrying dagger. Italian, about 1560–70. Walters Art Gallery, 51.522

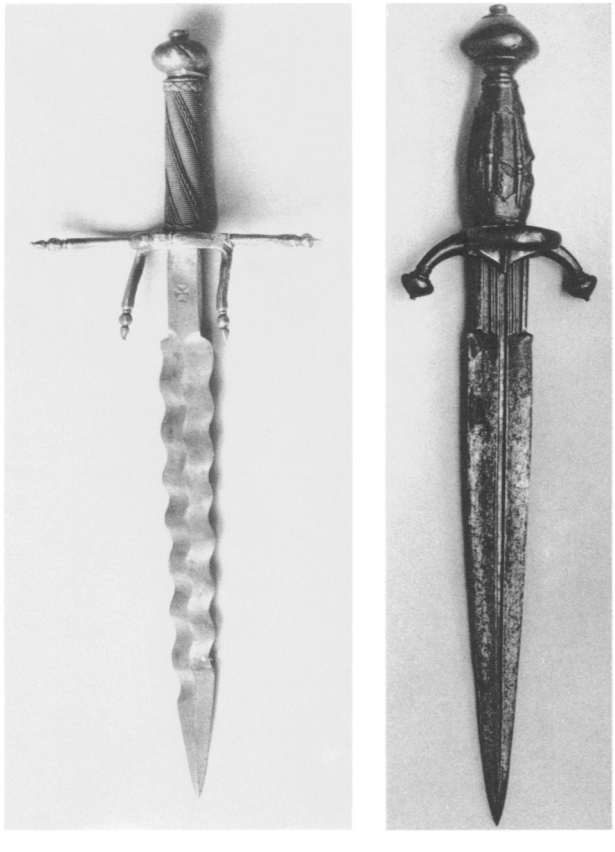
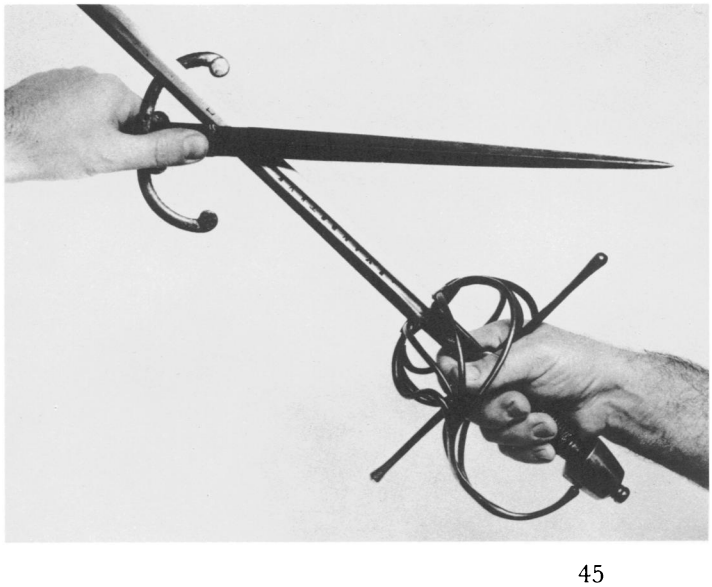


FIGURE 25
Parrying dagger. North Italian, about 1550–60. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Jean Jacques Reubell, 1926, in memory of his mother, Julia C. Coster, and of his wife, Adeline E. Post, both of New York City, 26.145.88

FIGURE 26
Tierce parry and catching of rapier blade with arched-crossguard parrying poniard. The crossguard being also outwardly curved, the trapping is easily done with either quillon. At close quarters, a swift and powerful sliding motion of the poniard over the rapier blade could inflict a thrust while the rapier was kept away in "opposition." Poniard, French (?), about 1570–80. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Jean Jacques Reubell, 1926, in memory of his mother, Julia C. Coster, and of his wife, Adeline E. Post, both of New York City, 26.145.99



case the fencer could not complete a circular motion of the hand to expose the side ring to the blow. With the increasing complication of swordplay in di Grassi's day, the arched crossguard underwent a technically simple but very important modification that perfected the form of this most convenient parrying weapon. Both ends of the arched quillons were slightly bent toward the side ring, enabling the fencer to trap a parried blade more easily and to jam it by a swift twist of the hand. When such a situation occurred close to, a rapid and vigorous slide of the dagger, commanding the trapped blade, could lead to a thrust inflicted with the dagger itself (Figure 26).

The long popularity of parrying daggers with arched crossguards was manifested, in particular, by the fact that a *daghetta*, a light version of the "cinquedea," survived its heavy prototype and continued in use, at least in its native land, Italy, well into the last third of the sixteenth century, as shown by numerous illustrations in a fencing treatise by Giovanni Antonio Lovino (about 1580).[26] The parrying daggers pictured therein had the great advantage over their forerunners from the turn of the century (Figures 1, 2) in that they were equipped with the side ring (Figure 27).

With all their practical merits, arched-crossguard daggers had one deceptive quality that hindered their universal adoption, at the expense of other types of parrying weapons. A fencer using such a dagger had to be a very skillful fighter. In particular, having caught his opponent's blade, he had to know how to use this tense moment to advantage, and how to free his dagger when necessary without "sticking" himself in the otherwise extremely dangerous engagement. The parrying dagger provided with still more sophisticated sword traps could prove even more treacherous if its owner had not mastered the weapon. This was probably one of the reasons why many swordsmen preferred daggers of simpler designs, such as those with straight crossguard and side ring. These were widely used in Germany, where the style of double fencing was less complicated than in Italy or France.

As has been pointed out, the side ring hinted at on some early Landsknecht daggers and portrayed by Marozzo, played the essential part in the designing of effective parrying weapons. The function of the side ring was performed by a shell bent toward the blade in certain heavy Landsknecht daggers, already spoken of, and Marc de la Beraudière (1608) mentions "advantageous poniards" equipped with a shell that well covered the hand.[27] A French parrying dagger of about 1600, with arched quillons and shell guard bent toward the grip (Figure 28), corresponds exactly to this description and has analogies to contemporary shell-guard swords.[28] The English fencing master George Silver,

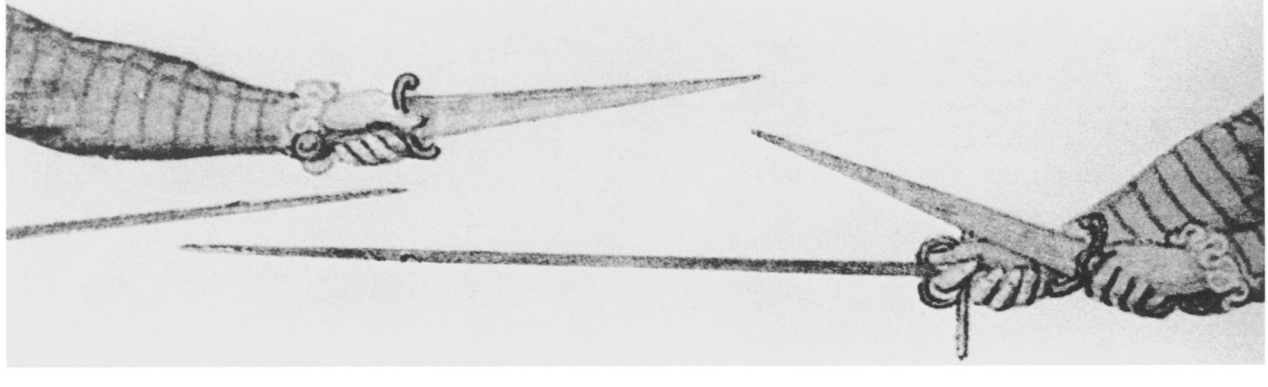
26. G. A. Lovino [*Traité d'escrime dédié au roi Henri III*], Italian MS No. 959, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. Facsimile edition, BN, n.d.

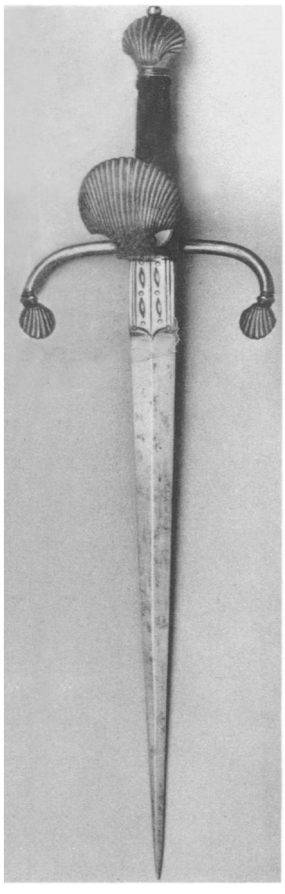
27. M. de la Beraudière, *Le combat de seul à seul en camp clos* (Paris, 1608) p. 182: "Le poignard est semblablement rendu advantageux d'vne coquille bien couuerte."

28. A. R. Dufty, *European Swords and Daggers in the Tower of London* (London, 1974) pl. 41 a, b.

FIGURE 27

Cinquedea-type parrying daggers with side ring. Manuscript fencing treatise by G. A. Lovino, about 1580 Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris; facsimile publication, pl. XXXII.





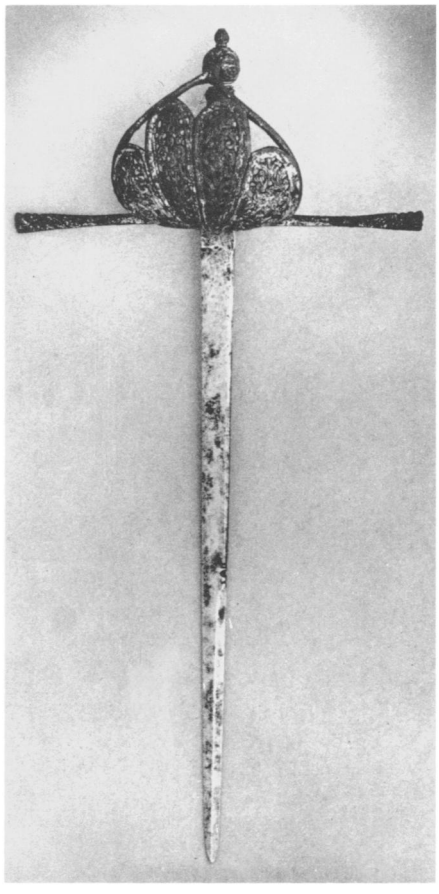


FIGURE 28
Parrying poniard. French, about 1600. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of William H. Riggs, 1913, 14.25.1288

FIGURE 29
Parrying dagger. Spanish, early 17th century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 04.3.119

active during the same period, probably meant daggers of this general design when he wrote of a "close hylt vpon yor daggr hand."[29]

A finer rapier play in the second half of the sixteenth century was responsible for parrying daggers in which a steel screen was fixed inside the ring to protect fingers against a thrust into the ring itself. In another design a very large side ring was supplemented by an underlying concave shell, with a slight clearance between them, to trap a blade. Later, Spanish masters developed this type to a close shell guard with long straight quillons (Figure 29). This design facilitated intercepting the rapier blade and jamming it, in the way performed with arched-crossguard daggers. While enlarging defense fields covered by respective parries, long quillons on Spanish daggers and swords made fine disengagements and feints at a close distance much more difficult and risky, for the fencer who began such an action inevitably had to circumvent the quillons, thus greatly uncovering himself and giving his adversary an ostensible advantage. These weapons well fell in line with the overcomplicated principles of the Spanish fencing school. Followers of the other schools preferred the parrying dagger with simple side ring and arched or straight crossguard, and this design was the most popular one for a hundred years.

A dagger with side ring was nearly as portable as one without the ring, but the swordsman who carried a parrying dagger felt much more assured if he knew he might have to draw. The side ring in no way prevented the dagger from being used as an ordinary knife or dagger (that is, gripped with the thumb at the pommel), while the dagger without side ring, while useful for stabbing, could not be used so well in fencing. If the side ring or an adequate protective device is taken as the distinguishing feature of parrying weapons, it can be stated that their number is the majority among all kinds of daggers and poniards preserved from about 1525 to 1650. This is quite understandable, since it is only logical to suppose that most armed men preferred to carry parrying weapons, fit for any use, in preference to ordinary daggers and poniards. Accordingly, it seems reasonable to assume that the greater part of all daggers and poniards produced during this period were parrying weapons of one design or another. Among the exceptions are parade or costume daggers, and smaller weapons for covert carrying, such as stilettos. However, even these light, graceful poniards were sometimes provided with a side ring (Figures 30, 31), sufficient to give the fingers minimal protection if one wished to parry but not so bulky as to hamper concealment under the dress when necessary. This combination of stiletto and parrying poniard seems to have been particularly popu-

29. *The Works of George Silver*, ed. Cyril G. R. Matthey (London, 1898) pp. 106–107.

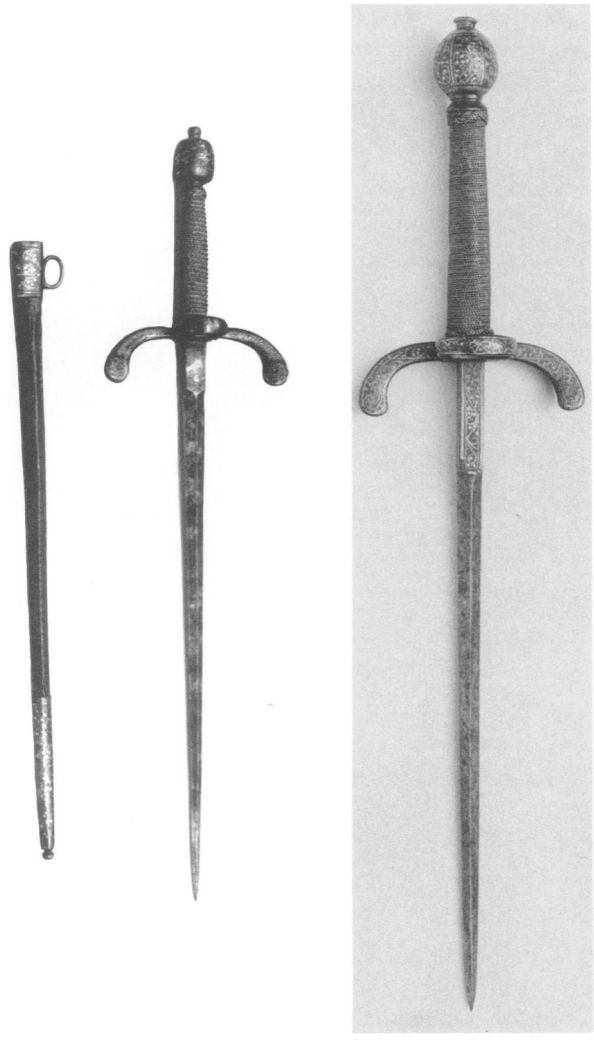


FIGURE 30
Parrying poniard (stiletto). The loop on the scabbard shows that this weapon was attached to the belt in vertical position, probably frontal right or left side. French, about 1550–75. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Jean Jacques Reubell, 1926, in memory of his mother, Julia C. Coster, and of his wife, Adeline E. Post, both of New York City, 26.145.85

FIGURE 31
Parrying stiletto. Italian or French, about 1560–80. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Jean Jacques Reubell, 1926, in memory of his mother, Julia C. Coster, and of his wife, Adeline E. Post, both of New York City, 26.145.117

FIGURE 32
Parrying stiletto. In the absence of a side ring, the arched crossguard is bent outward to protect the fingers. Swiss or German, mid-16th century. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Jean Jacques Reubell, 1926, in memory of his mother, Julia C. Coster, and of his wife, Adeline E. Post, both of New York City, 26.145.101

lar in Italy and France, as shown by the number of these weapons preserved in collections.[30] In some parrying stilettos the blade-stopping function was performed by outwardly bent quillons (Figure 32); less effective than the side ring, this design made the stiletto easier to conceal.

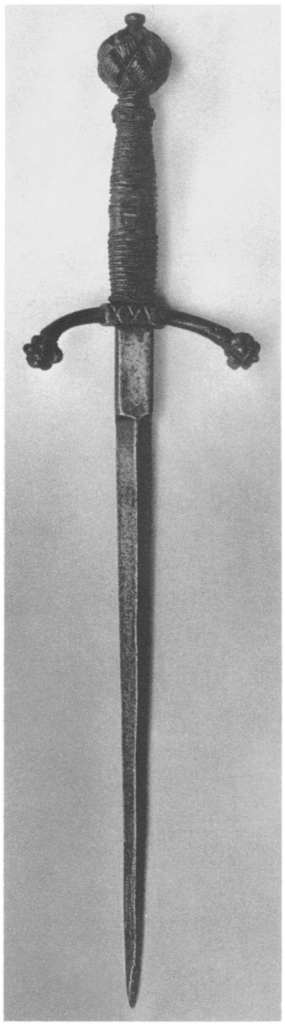
So potent were the tradition, fashion, and habit of using a weapon for parries that a fencer without his dagger, cloak, or gloves sometimes ventured to beat off the adversary's blade with his unprotected hand. This was the case with de Quielus, in the "duel des mignons" (1578), when he "had his hand all cut by wounds."[31] On such occasions anything fit to parry with could be used, as pictured in a German treatise (1612) wherein a fencer (a left-hander, by the way) beats off the sword with his scabbard and hanger and wins, his opponent also being without a parrying dagger.[32]

The design and perfection of parrying weapons depended greatly on the collaboration of fencing masters

30. Bashford Dean appeared to hesitate in classifying stilettos with side ring in the Metropolitan Museum, describing them as "stylets which in fact, were it not for their small size and slender blades, might justly be included with parrying daggers" (*Catalogue of European Daggers*, p. 142). Nevertheless, he placed these weapons in the group entitled "Stylets—parrying daggers." Besides the three stilettos I illustrate as Figures 30–32, I feel that others in the Metropolitan's collection belong to the same group: nos. 14.25.1300 and 26.145.85, 101, 113–115, 117.

31. Brantôme, pp. 100–101: "pour parer et destourner les coups que l'autre luy donnoit, il avoit la man toute découpée de playes."

32. J. Sutor, *New Künstliches Fechtbuch* (Frankfurt, 1612), facsimile edition (Stuttgart, 1849) p. 75.



with sword-makers. The sword-maker, apart from being an artisan, had to understand the qualities and functions required of the weapons he was to create. Starting with the adjustment of weapons current in the early sixteenth century to a new use, by modifying their guards, the next, and most important, step was taken when parrying daggers with side ring were designed. The gradual refinement of double fencing led to more complicated parrying techniques, and the development of the parrying weapons themselves was largely responsible for the process. Some of the dagger designs were inspired by a whim or the imagination of individual inventors and did not become popular; other patterns gained widespread recognition, thanks either to simplicity in their use (the straight-crossguard dagger) or to constructional subtleties for more complex actions (the dagger with arched and outwardly bent crossguard). Not only hilts but blades of parrying weapons were subject to changes and improvements. A massive double-edged blade of a simple shape was retained for more than a hundred years in heavy parrying daggers used with cut-and-thrust swords (Figures 6–11, 17, 19 left and right, 25). The prevalence of the thrust in rapier play, from the mid-sixteenth century on, and the gradual lightening of sword blades in this connection, affected the parrying weapons. Increasingly, daggers and poniards were given lighter, often only thrusting, blades in which a delicate balance of rigidity and elasticity necessary to withstand severe shocks, was obtained by skillful combinations of ridges, grooves, and perforations (Figures 13, 14, 19 center, 20).[33] About the same time, stiff blades of square or triangular section started regaining the popularity they had enjoyed until the early sixteenth century. More slender and graceful in stilettos, these blades formed perfect stabbing tools, yet a stiletto of medium or large size, with a side ring, was strong and reliable enough to parry a light thrusting rapier (Figures 28–30).

Studying various specimens of parrying weapons, one cannot help feeling that many of them were produced by connoisseurs of swordplay who must have possessed a refined knowledge of the potential performance of given designs. It does not seem unlikely that some of these makers were very keen on fencing themselves, as was surely the case with the artists who illustrated the treatises and displayed an excellent understanding of most complicated actions. During the heyday of double fencing, the craftsmen certainly sought to provide a wide assortment of parrying daggers and poniards, so that a fencer might have weapons according to his particular taste, skill, training style, and favorite parrying methods. A number of swords and daggers were also made to replace damaged or lost weapons, an unavoidable effect of the dueling epidemic that ravaged Europe for many decades. These considerations taken together, it is hardly correct to assume that all parrying daggers and poniards were made en suite with swords and rapiers. Such sets, often artis-

33. For a diagrammed analysis of the structure of these blades, Dean, *Catalogue of European Daggers*, p. 111.

tically decorated and provided with no less expensive belts and hangers adorned to match the weapons, were mostly created to special order or were kept in stock for prospective wealthy buyers. Such garnitures must have been financially out of reach for many adepts of sword-and-dagger fencing, and there can be little doubt that ordinary customers took their picks of separate parrying weapons and swords, which therefore had to be produced in considerable quantities. Accordingly, it seems not at all necessary to consider any parrying dagger or poniard, preserved without a matching sword or rapier, as the only remaining part of a former garniture.

Most of the iconographic material shows parrying daggers and poniards fastened on the sword belt almost horizontally on the back, hilts near the right elbow. This position was known since the later part of the fifteenth century (it is seen, for instance, in the *Miracle of St. Bernardino* by Pinturicchio, in the Pinacoteca of Perugia). It must have become particularly convenient and fashionable with parrying daggers, since their hilts could embarrass movements of the hands when the weapons were fixed on the side or in front. However, an impressive number of pictures show other ways of wearing parrying daggers. Quite often they are represented on the back, with hilt to the left (Figure 5). Many such examples can be found in engravings by J. Tortorel and J. Perissin, produced by 1570.[34] A dagger in the Metropolitan Museum (04.3.149) has a scabbard with belt loop inclined so that it could be worn only with the hilt at the left elbow, if suspended on the back (or with hilt toward the right side if worn in front, which would have been awkward because of the horizontal position of the dagger). Parrying weapons are sometimes shown fastened vertically to the sword belt in front, as in the *Portrait of a Maltese Knight* by S. Cavagna, about 1620.[35]

Setting about a combat, the fencer's normal first move was to disembarrass himself of the sword scabbard. Before a formal duel, he had time to do this in two different ways. He could unhook the sword hanger and supporting strap from the belt, leaving his dagger on his waist, or he could take off the belt with both its weapons and then unsheathe them. In a sudden encounter, the procedure would be quite different. Pulling back the sword scabbard with hanger, he would draw as quickly as possible, then move his free hand from the scabbard to the grip of his dagger to draw it, too. The speed and ease of these movements depended not only on the weapons and accouterments but also on the person's build, first of all on the reach of his hands, a personal peculiarity that must often have determined the method of carrying the parrying dagger. A right-hander could well follow the fashion and fix his dagger on the back, its pommel protruding at the right elbow, if his left hand could reach the dagger grip without difficulty. Experiments show that a man of average build can draw a dagger fixed on his back, as this used to be done, and a man with longish arms is able to do the same even when wearing light half-armor. In this position, too, the dagger could easily be drawn by the right hand for stabbing.[36] The dagger on the back was unobtrusive and did not hinder movements, but, apart from that, it was convenient for either of the alternative uses that made this manner of carrying preferable. However, for stout persons, or those wearing heavy, fluffy dress, this mode could cause problems when prompt unsheathing was important. Understandably, the dagger was then fixed on the right side or even more at the front, as portrayed sometimes in paintings and engravings.

It can be surmised that some eccentric right-handed swashbucklers liked to carry their daggers fixed behind, with the hilt at the left elbow, for parrying use exclusively. But in general this was the normal position for left-handed fencers, enabling them to use the weapon in either way with the appropriate hand. When the iconographical documentation shows daggers carried this way, one may surmise that the wearer is left-handed. Among extant weapons intended for left-handers, there is a parrying dagger that simply could not be used otherwise than in the right hand (Figure 23), while another, mentioned above, could be fixed on the belt at the left side only, as clearly indicated by the loop on the scabbard.

Of all types of parrying edged weapons, only daggers and poniards with symmetric guards did equally well for both right- and left-handed fencers. This may have been an additional reason for the widespread popular-

34. J. Tortorel, J. Perissin, *Les grandes scènes historiques du* XVI*e siècle*, ed. A. Franklin (Paris, 1886).

35. Museo Bardini, Florence; L. G. Boccia, E. T. Coelho, *Armi bianchi italiane* (Milan, 1975) ills. 568, 569.

36. The use of the parrying dagger as an ordinary stabbing poniard or knife is well illustrated in Salvator Fabris, *De lo schermo overo scienza d'arme* (Copenhagen, 1606) pp. 251, 253, 255.

ity of parrying weapons with a straight or arched cross-guard. The same feature appeared in the Spanish-type dagger with knuckle shell and long quillons. However, the latter was too clumsy for constant carrying, while a dagger with comparatively small symmetric guard could be comfortably worn on the belt for any length of time. The only detail, in such a dagger, that had to be fixed by the sword-maker or furbisher for left-handers, was a belt loop welded to the scabbard at a proper angle.

An important question may arise here: which were those weapons that could properly fit the left-handed fencer? Apart from weapons expressly made to their orders,[37] such swordsmen could use a large variety of two-edged swords and rapiers, as well as tucks, that had any kind of symmetric guard, with or without a closed knuckle-guard. As for guards of asymmetric construction, only those without knuckle-guards were good for left-handers. It goes almost without saying that weapons from both these groups did equally well for right-handers.

He that would fight with his Sword and Buckler, or Sword and Dagger, being weapons of true defence, will not fight with his Rapier and Poiniard wherein no true defence or fight is perfect.

George Silver, *Paradoxes of Defence*, 1599.[38]

These words express the approach of a leading English master to the sword and dagger, considered by him as national weapons, and to the rapier and poniard, brought to England from the Continent. This opposition is characteristic of both Silver's known publications. With invariable disdain he speaks of "the worst weapon, an imperfect and insufficient weapon . . . that is, the single Rapier, and Rapier and Poiniard."[39] The main difference between the weapons, in terms of practical use, is thus explained: "The single Rapier, or Rapier & Poiniard, they are imperfect & insufficient weapons" because the rapier is "a childish toy wherewith a man can do nothing but thrust." On the other hand "The short Sword, and Sword and Dagger, are perfect good weapons . . . to carry, to draw, to be nimble withall, to strike, to cut, to thrust, both strong and quicke."[40]

It is apparent that by *dagger* Silver had in mind a solid two-edged weapon resembling his favorite cut-and-thrust sword, while the name *poiniard* was applied by him to a lighter weapon with a narrow thrusting blade, much like that of a contemporary dueling rapier. It was only natural to associate this light parrying weapon with Italian or Spanish rapier play. Silver's standpoint was evidently shared by other English swordsmen, for one of them, in a pamphlet published some twenty-five years after Silver's works, triumphantly describes a fight of a gentleman armed "with an English Quarter Staffe against Three Spanish Rapiers and Poniards."[41] The word *poniard* (also *puniard, ponyard, poyniard*), recorded in English from the 1580s,[42] was an obvious Gallicism, and this fact eventually emerged in minds of educated people in appropriate context. It figures, for instance, in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (act 5, scene 2) when Osric names rapier and dagger as weapons of the forthcoming contest but in a moment says that Laertes staked (against the king's wager) "six French rapiers and poniards."

The suggested connotations of *dagger* and *poniard* in English fencing terminology are verified by Jean Nicot (1530–1600), a French linguist and contemporary of Silver's. Nicot explains the word *dague*: "A kind of short sword, almost a third of normal sword length; it is not carried usually with hangers of a sword belt nor hanging on the left side (for the right-handers), as one does with a sword, but attached to the belt on the right side or on the back. Now the dagger is large and has a sword-like point, it is now forged with two ridges between the cutting edges and with a sharper point. . . . The dagger could be also called poniard although the poniard is both shorter and less overloaded with steel [less massive]."[42]

37. A saber in the Metropolitan Museum (14.99.77a, b) could have been used by a left-hander only, for it has a closed guard and a thumb ring on the left side of the guard.

38. *Works of George Silver*, p. 56.

39. Op. cit., p. 30.

40. Op. cit., pp. 32–33.

41. Wise, *Personal Combat*, p. 61.

42. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s. v.

43. J. Nicot, *Thresor de la langve françoise* (Paris, 1606/1621) s.v. Dague: "Est vne maniere de courte espée, d'vn tiers presque de la deüe [due] longueur d'vne espée, qu'on porte d'ordinaire non auec pendants de ceinture à espée, ne pendant du costé gauche (pour les droitiers) ainsi qu'on fait l'espée, ains attachée droite à la ceinture du costé droit, ou sur les reins. Laquelle ores est large et à poincte d'espée, ores est façonnée à 2 arestes entre les trenchans, et à poincte plus aigue. . . . La dague se pourroit aussi nommer poignard, co[m]bien que le poignard soit et plus court et moins chargé de maitière."

Nicot describes the *poignard* as "a kind of short dagger, with four-ridge blade having a bead-like point, while the dagger has a wider blade with point like that of a sword."[44]

It is sufficient to look at the actual weapons of Silver's and Nicot's period (Figures 14, 19) to be convinced of the accuracy of their descriptions. Without comprehending, naturally, all types of the weapons concerned, their basic features and respective differences are clearly outlined by Nicot's entries, which confirm the correctness of the proposed understanding of terms discussed as used by Silver.

There is a certain importance in Nicot's remark that the *dague* could be called a *poignard*, were it not for their difference in size and weight. This observation may well indicate what was happening in everyday life and language: that is, a reciprocal colloquial substitution of words whose meanings were so close that only professionals having some special purpose thought it necessary to make distinctions.

In England, *dagger*, contrary to *poniard*, had a long-standing tradition,[45] and even after the emergence of the new weapon, coming from abroad with its own name, the national term continued in common use to cover all weapon variations similar to daggers. This tendency toward generalization influenced even such a discriminating specialist as George Silver, who used, in one passage, the expression "rapier and dagger."[46] Analogously, *sword* was employed as a general term and *rapier* was a more specific term, as witnessed, for instance, in the English translation of Vincentio Saviolo's treatise, in which *rapier and dagger* and *sword and dagger* are used in descriptions of fencing with rapier and poniard.[47] This confusion of the general and the particular is recorded, as well, in contemporary Italian-English dictionaries,[48] where one can find such explanations as

Daga, a short sword, a dagger.

Pugnale, a dagger, a poyniard [also ponyard, poynado].

Spada, any kinde of sworde, rapier; or blade, or glaiue.

In France, *dague* and *poignard* probably had comparable traditions in ancientness, both being recorded from around 1400,[49] and the distinction of their meanings, so well explained by Jean Nicot, was more or less preserved until the seventeenth century. In the treatise by the Antwerp master Girard Thibault, dedicated to Spanish-style fencing with the thrusting rapier, the parrying weapon is always *le poignard*, and it is only this thrusting weapon that is pictured in the excellent detailed engravings illustrating the chapters on double fencing.[50] Equally, *le poignard* alone is mentioned by Marc de la Beraudière, who tried to develop the dueling code in a period when the Italian and Spanish schools of fencing with the thrusting rapier dominated France.[51] On the other hand, the treatise of Henry de Sainct-Didier, dealing with the cut-and-thrust sword of the third quarter of the sixteenth century, and still favoring the cut, omits *le poignard* and indicates only *la dague* as a weapon to accompany this sword.[52]

There are some revealing points, for the present subject, in the tales of Brantôme, who spent part of his life as a professional soldier and studied fencing in Milan. Some of his events, having occurred before his own time, he relates after other narrators, and he takes special care to emphasize the archaism of certain expressions in them. In a story about a duel between two Spaniards in northern Italy in the early 1500s, Brantôme says: "Leur combat fut à cheval à la genette, & à la rapière, & le poignard (ainsi parloit-on alors)."[53] However, of another duel of the same period, Brantôme writes, the adversaries received "deux segrettes et deux rapières bien tranchantes (j'useray de ces mots du temps passé pour suivre le texte & mieux observer & honnorer l'antiquité) & deux poignards."[54] Thus, it

44. Op. cit. s.v. Poignard: "Est vne espèce de dague courte, la lame à quatre arestes, ayant la poincte en grain d'orge, là où la dague a la lame plus large, et la poincte en façon d'espée."

45. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. dagger (recorded from the fourteenth century).

46. *Works of George Silver*, p. 66.

47. V. Saviolo, *His practise . . . of the use of the rapier and dagger* (London, 1595).

48. J. Florio, *A worlde of wordes* (London, 1598); *Qveen Anna's new world of words* (London, 1611); *Vocabolario Italiano & Inglese* (London, 1688).

49. F. Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française* (Paris, 1880–1920) s.vs.

50. Thibault, *Académie de l'espée.*

51. Beraudière, *Combat de seul à seul.*

52. H. de Sainct-Didier, *Traicté . . . sue l'espée seule* (Paris, 1573).

53. Brantôme, p. 37.

54. Brantôme, p. 32.

can be deduced that the author did not consider *poignard* an archaism. The more accurate and trustworthy of Brantôme's tales, naturally, are those of events from his own lifetime, particularly those that he witnessed himself. Here, he uses *dague* much more often, describing it as a cut-and-thrust weapon. The story of a combat in Rome, in 1559, mentions "une courte dague, bien tranchante & bien poinctue," and referring to his sojourn in Milan Brantôme remembers a local swordsmith who made "deux pairs d'armes, tant espée que dague . . . tranchantes, picquantes."[55] A frequent use of the expression *espée et dague* by Brantôme[56] and other French authors gives ground to think that from the second half of the sixteenth century this became a generality equivalent to the English *sword and dagger*. *Rapière*, a loanword in German and English, fell out of use in France at this period, while *dague* took on a broad general meaning in everyday language. *Poignard* seems to have survived this trend toward generalization but remained in a lesser use, mostly by fencers, swordsmen, and linguists, all of whom continued to employ *dague* and *poignard* in their traditional exactness. There is a possibility that the term *dague* as well as the current *épée et dague* developed wider use and significance under the strong influence of the Spanish language, wherein *espada y daga* was the only common turn of speech to cover double-fencing weapons irrespective of their design.

In German, *Dolch* invariably appears as a general designation of any type of dagger, including different types of parrying weapons. Having adopted *Rappier* from French,[57] the German fencing lexicon retained the ancient national term for daggers in general and thus formed a heterogeneous locution, *Rappier und Dolch*, recorded in fencing books of the later part of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

The Italian military and fencing vocabulary of the sixteenth century still distinguished between *daga* and *pugnale*. In a dueling book of 1521, *daga* is listed among the principal weapons then commonly accepted in personal combats while *pugnale* is included in "altre piccole" weapons admissible for carrying by duelists in addition to their main armament.[58] Both weapons are again specified in a dueling treatise of 1560.[59] Meanwhile the expression *spada e pugnale*, as a general reference to edged weapons used in double fencing, was becoming part of the vocabulary of the new fighting style.[60] The generalization of *spada* and of *pugnale* continued. By the middle of the century *pugnale* had already been used to designate any weapon of its kind, either thrusting or edged, as can be seen from a dueling code that puts in its list of weapons one should refuse to fight with "pugnali senza taglio, senza punta, ò senza schina."[61] Di Grassi's book, representing the Italian style of the third quarter of the sixteenth century, often mentions *pugnale co'l taglio* and once instructs the fencer to direct its edge toward the enemy in order to inflict a cutting wound."[62] The connotation of *pugnale* continued to widen until, in the seventeenth century, *daga* became, if surely not forgotten, at least an unfashionable word, while *pugnale* and its derivatives remained in common use, covering an array of short-blade weapons. In an English-Italian dictionary of this period[63] one finds

A dagger, pugnale.
A great dagger, pugnalone, pugnalaccio.
A little dagger, pugnaletto.
A poniard, pugnale.

It is interesting to note that in Spanish and French the generalization of the terms led to the formation of identical word combinations, *espada y daga* and *épée et dague*, whereas the parallel Italian expression, *spada e pugnale*, was equivalent only in general connotation, its second part being entirely different etymologically. The Italian usage did not modify the French one, but it could well have contributed to the continuing use of the locution *épée et poignard*.

55. Brantôme, pp. 66, 80.
56. Brantôme, pp. 229, 231, 233, 260, etc.
57. J. and W. Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, s.v. In 1570 Joachim Meyer pointed out that the *Rappier* had been invented and brought to Germany "by other nations" (*Gründliche Beschreibung der . . . Kunst des Fechtens* [Strassburg, 1570] f. L).
58. Puteo, *Duello*, f. G [v].
59. [Girolamo] Mutio Iustinopolitano, *La Faustina delle armi cavalleresche* (Venice, 1560) p. 32: "daghe, daghette, pugnali di diuerse maniere."
60. Puteo, *Duello*, f. G [VI]: "con spate et pugnali."
61. [Sebastiano] Fausto da Longiano, *Duello regolato à le leggi de l'honore* (Venice, 1551) p. 54.
62. G. di Grassi, p. 39: "tenendolo con il taglio uerso l'inimico si ha questo auantagio che co'l pugnale si puo ferire de taglio."
63. Torriano, *Dictionary English and Italian* (London, 1687) s. vs.

It may seem strange that parrying weapons, despite their widespread popularity over a period of one hundred and fifty years, did not receive special names to distinguish them from ordinary daggers and poniards.[64] This fact does not look unnatural, however, in the light of the foregoing conclusion that during the sword-and-dagger era most daggers and poniards were provided with a parrying guard that made them fit for any appropriate use. This also explains why an early special term, *pugnale bolognese*, had a regional circulation only and turned out to be short-lived, for very soon this particular form lost its novelty in the multitude of parrying weapons.

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64. In view of the evidence considered, it is hard to accept Bashford Dean's definition of poniards as "quillon daggers which from the early sixteenth century were used in the left hand as an aid to parrying" (*Catalogue of European Daggers*, p. 8). Heribert Seitz mentions a Spanish term, *daga de mano izquierda* (also *mano izquierda* and *izquierda*), for Spanish shell-guard daggers of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but without a reference to his source (*Blankwaffen*, II, pp. 138, 139, 192). Though the term may have been used casually, the most reliable dictionaries (J. Corominas, *Diccionario crítico etimológico de la lengua castellana* [Berna, 1954]; M. Alonso, *Enciclopedia del idioma* [Madrid, 1958]; Real Academia Española, *Diccionario de la lengua española* [Madrid, 1970]) do not mention it.