

PIETRO MONTE'S *COLLECTANEA*: A COMPENDIUM OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE BODY, HEALTH AND EXERCISE

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Pietro Monte is known as the author of treatises on various subjects, from theology to military strategy to wrestling. His works, written in Latin, in Spanish or both, were printed in his lifetime or shortly after his death, showing that they were in demand. His longest work, *Collectanea*, is his *magnum opus*, but it is also a work that poses considerable challenges in terms of classification and organization. The material seems to be presented at times in a rather haphazard manner, as different from the encyclopedia of the medieval period, a genre best exemplified by Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies*. Instead, Monte presents in a stream-of-consciousness structure a variety of topics, ranging from wrestling and fighting with various weapons to athletic and gymnastic exercise (running, throwing and vaulting), to bodily humors, physical and mental health, and the influence of bodily conformation on one's health and athletic performance. His description of exercises, fighting and, especially, wrestling techniques pose their own challenges: being rather cryptic in the absence of illustrations. The matter is further complicated by the fact that Monte uses a variety of native Spanish terms in his Latin text to refer to specific moves. This paper will consider the purpose of Monte's treatise, its intended and real audiences, as far as these can be gleaned from the surviving printed and manuscript copies, and, most importantly, the place of Monte's work in the contemporary tradition of encyclopedic writing.

THE MAN WHO TAUGHT LEONARDO DA VINCI DARTS

Pietro Monte (1457 to circa 1509) has left us a number of treatises, including two important ones on physical education and sports: *The Appraisal of Men (De Dignoscendis Hominibus)*, published in 1492, and *A Collection of Exercises and Military Arts (Exercitiorum Atque Artis Militaris Collectanea)*, the first medieval encyclopedia of physical culture. The *Collectanea* was probably completed in 1507-8 and published after his death in 1509.¹ Monte has left his imprint in the mind of his contemporaries, most notably Baldesar Castiglione, the author of the Renaissance treatise *The Book of the Courtier*, and Leonardo da Vinci.² Yet we know next to nothing about his biography or his career: even his origins are uncertain, as some scholars think, based on his legacy, that he was a Spaniard who served at various Italian courts, while others maintained he was an Italian who had spent time in

Spain. The first hypothesis is more likely, as his references to Spain are invariably complimentary, and he uses many technical terms, in particular for wrestling and fencing, in his treatises, which were ultimately published in Latin.

We also do not know what he looked like. The image on pages five and six may give some idea of what the author of *Collectanea* imagined the soldier would look like, an ideal to which his implied readers would have aspired.

The athletic proportions of the Wound Man from the early sixteenth-century German treatise, in all his violent vulnerability, give some hint at the dangers and discomforts to which the body of a soldier, Monte's near contemporary, would have been exposed. In turn, the harmonious proportions of Leonardo's Virtuvian man remind the viewer of the notions of balance and moderation stressed by Monte on numerous occasions throughout his treatises. The association between Leonardo and Monte suggests a tantalizing hint that this, or one of the other studies by Leonardo, may preserve a vague likeness of the legendary master. One of Leonardo's notes alludes to the fact that the perfect method of throwing "darts," or spears, has been demonstrated and explained to him by the fencing master Pietro Monte.³

One of the early scholars of Monte, Sydney Anglo, summarizes Monte's contribution to the art of war and the practice of cultivating the human body as follows:

No master was more comprehensive [in his writings] than Pedro Monte in 1509. He not only deals with wrestling, dagger fighting, the use of long and short lance, two-handed sword and the single-sword on its own or in combination with various types of shield and buckler and cape; he also discusses the various types of pole arm such as the partisan, the ronca, spe-

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tum, and halberd. He examines in detail fencing and wrestling on horseback, along with various types of mounted lance combat; treats physical exercises such as running, jumping, and vaulting; provides a little encyclopedia of contemporary arms and armor; and finally places the entire corpus of material within a broader context of the art of war.⁴

MONTE'S PRECURSORS: PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND CULTURE IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE

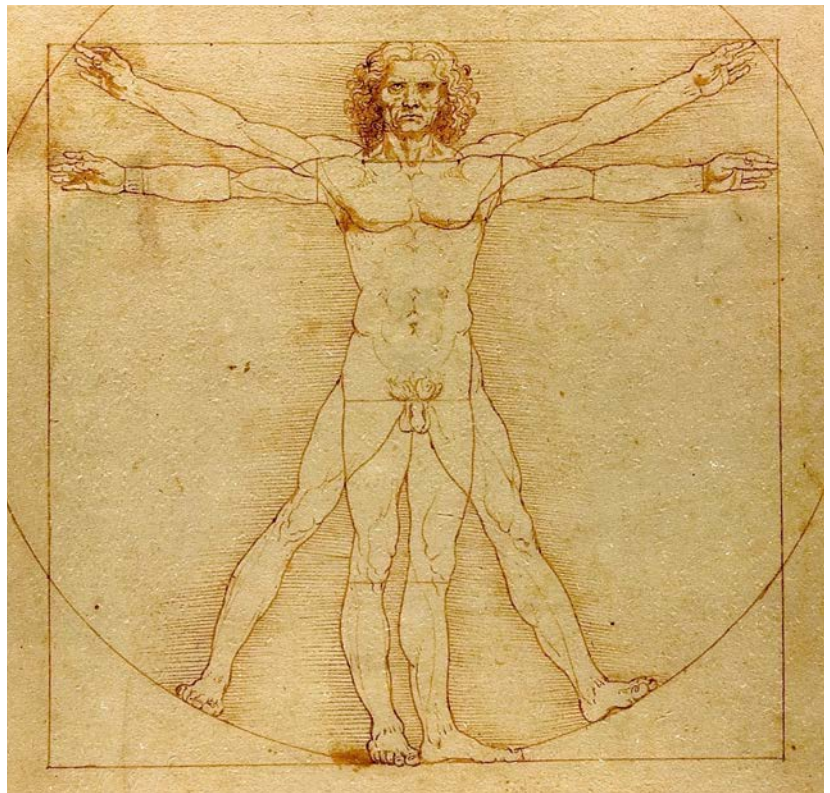
Contrary to the popular perception of the Middle Ages as the dark age when cultivation of the body was discouraged by the church, medieval Europe was not ignorant of the benefits physical education can bring, especially to the members of the warrior elite. There have been several studies arguing that noble-born boys received extensive physical education, especially in the domains that could be useful for their martial careers, and, notably, it is the applicability of physical exercise to war that Monte emphasizes throughout his *Collectanea*. However, the physical education of girls was not ignored, either, as girls of noble birth learned horse riding and falconry. The physical education of boys from chivalric and, later, gentry families encompassed, in addition to riding and falconry, fencing with a variety of weapons, wrestling, often archery, hunting big game as well as vaulting and athletics, though there is less evidence on the latter practices.⁵ Swimming was not ignored, either, though Monte is among the first to discuss the importance of this exercise. Still, medieval manuscripts testify to the existence of swimming as an exercise in the Middle Ages, alongside wrestling, as miniatures, especially those in the lower margins of manuscripts (the so-called marginalia) show swimmers, wrestlers and jousters.⁶ The renowned French knight Boucicault, who lived in the fifteenth century, only several decades before Monte, is said to have perfected these chivalric practices.⁷ Still, none of the earlier authors discussed or argued the importance of physical education and culture to the same extent as Pietro Monte, who writes about the physical, mental and spiritual virtues that are to be attained and exercised by the military man envisaged by Monte. His range of topics encompasses the theory of the four humors (sanguinic, choleric, phlegmatic and melancholic) which was popular throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance; the correct diet for each type of exercise and lifestyle; a discussion of the lifestyle best suited for conceiving and raising healthy children; an appraisal of human physicality and man's spiritual and mental characteristics; as well as many other subjects, such as military strategy and tactics, fortification, etc., all of which would be useful to an aspiring man-at-arms at the turn of the

fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

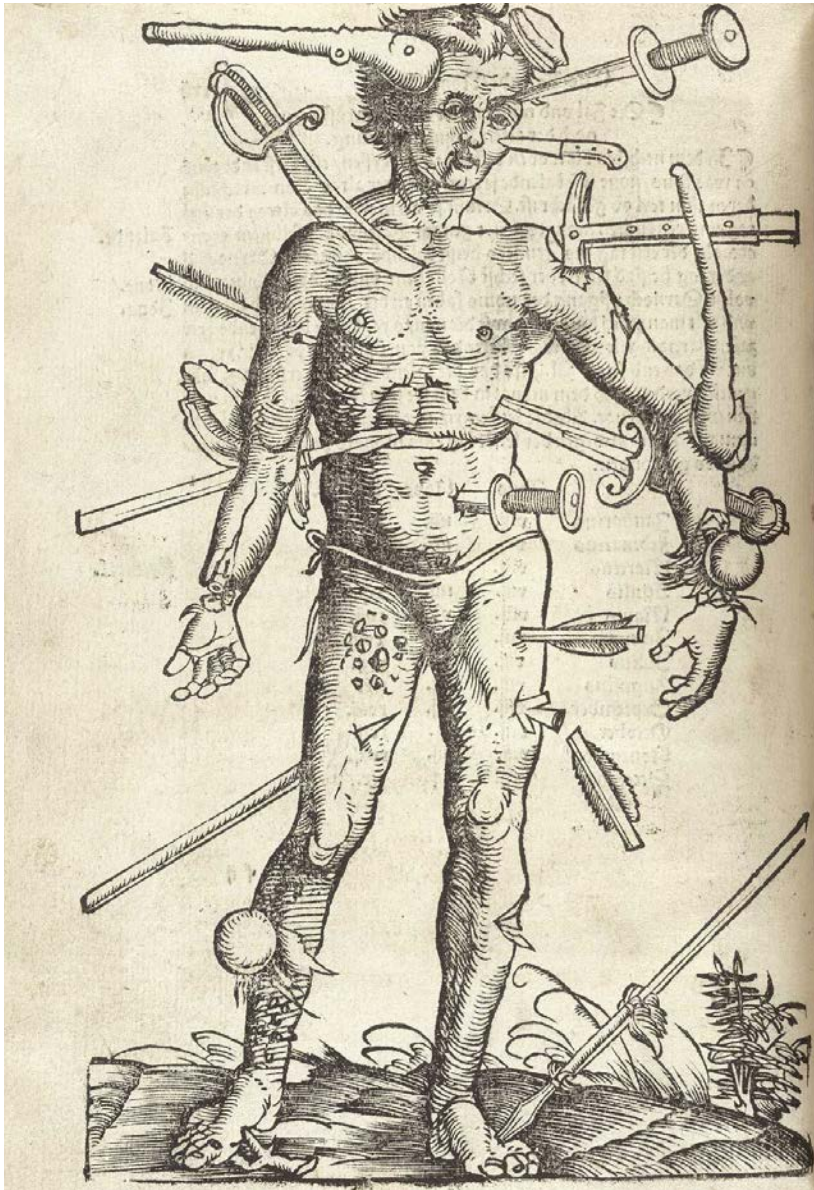
The most significant part of the treatise is devoted to the practice of various physical exercises or arts, their mechanics and technicalities. The pride of place is given to fencing with various weapons, most notably the two-handed sword and the poleaxe, the mastery of which would, according to Monte, enable the fencer to use other weapons well. He also devotes much space to wrestling, describing various techniques, as well as giving, elsewhere in the treatise, some notes on the peculiarities of wrestling practiced elsewhere in Europe. Monte has sections on equestrian vaulting, which encompassed mounting without stirrups and executing spins on a standing or running horse, similar to the modern gymnastic exercises of the pommel horse. The modern pommel horse's handles were derived from the pommels of medieval war saddles.

The sections on athletics include material on running on different terrains, running uphill and downhill, and running over long and short distances. It also discusses throwing projectiles such as the javelin; throwing small stones and a large stones like the modern athletic shot put; and jumping. He covers the medieval counterparts of the long jump, the triple jump, the high jump and the pole vault. All of these disciplines were to be practiced not as ends in themselves, but with an eye for public performance, a contest of strength, as well as being cultivated for the benefits they would bring on the battlefield.

Many of these arts are attested in other contem-



Along with the *Mona Lisa* and *The Last Supper*, Da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man* drawing is one of the most iconic images in the history of Western art. Drawn with pen and ink on paper, Da Vinci completed the *Vitruvian Man* around 1490. It was drawn as an homage to Vitruvius, a Roman architect who described the proportions of the human body in *De Architectura*.



Drawn as a guide to physicians about the kinds of possible injuries a soldier might experience in battle, there are several "Wound Man" drawings that have survived into the modern era. This image first appeared in 1517, after Monte's death, in Hans von Gersdorff's *Feldtbuch der Wundartzney*, a manual for military surgeons. The fact that the book was written and published in Germany makes it unlikely that the two men knew each other, but does not mean that some Renaissance soldiers may have looked much like the "Wound Man" before his injuries.

porary and later sources. Thus, an earlier fifteenth-century writer, the Portuguese King Edward I (Dom Duarte), in his *Art of Horsemanship*, describes some vaulting exercises, as well as wrestling and throwing the javelin and a small stone. Nevertheless, Duarte is dismissive of certain athletic practices noted by Monte, stating that certain athletic exercises are useless for a knight and warrior.⁸ Like Monte, Duarte commends hunting as preparation for genuine warfare, because it includes the element of danger, but, again like Monte, Duarte does not dwell on hunting. The practice of hunting, especially hunting big game, as chivalric exercise preparing a knight for combat is described in detail by Duarte's father, King João I of Portugal, in

his *Livro da Montaria (Book of the Hunt)*.⁹ Of course, as Duarte's title indicates, the focus of his treatise is on horse riding, and he devotes comparatively much space to jousting, a type of contest to which Monte devotes relatively little space, discussing fencing and wrestling contests in far more detail.

THE STRUCTURE OF MONTE'S TREATISE

As we have seen, Monte was not writing in isolation, even if his work is the most comprehensive one that existed in his time, and it certainly deserves the title of an encyclopedia, despite its haphazard design. The range of subject, which so impressed early scholars, and Monte's personal reputation among his contemporaries and successors, ensured that his treatise remained influential in the first half of the sixteenth century, having been available in print and manuscript copies.

Although the presentation of material may seem chaotic at first glance, it follows a certain pattern. In the first book, Monte describes the basics of physical exercises, wrestling, fencing, athletics and vaulting, followed by an exposition of his theory of humors, which he also describes as human complexions, and body types. Each humor has certain physical and mental properties, but Monte notes that any human being includes something of all the four humours. To be a perfect, harmonious person, one should aspire to having all the four humours balanced, yet this ideal was hardly attainable. This meant one should be mindful of one's natural limitations, for instance, being careful about one's diet if one tends towards fatness, or emphasizing agility training if one is too heavy. It is in this book that Monte also discusses the physicality of various animals and describes the ideal animal proportions, always comparing these to the proportions of human body. He also devotes a section on procreation and the upbringing of children, explaining the similarities between animals and humans in that, like animals, those humans who are physically fitter are more likely

to give birth to healthier, stronger children, whereas old, infirm, or indolent parents are likely to produce weaker offspring. Monte notes the importance of socializing the children, too. According to him, the children of nobility, albeit they may be lacking in physical accomplishments, are more likely to be more socially healthy than the children coming from lower social strata. This observation corresponds to what are known today as dysfunctional families, albeit, contrary to what Monte intimated, dysfunctional families may be encountered on all levels of society.

An important theme introduced in Book One and developed further in the subsequent book is the fostering

of moral and emotional qualities of a perfect soldier and athlete. Monte discusses the relation between skill and courage, the usefulness and handicaps that fear can impose and other subjects from the areas of human psychology and mental training technique. Interestingly, Monte's interest in fear as motivator and inhibitor are shared by Dom Duarte, who devotes several chapters of his brief treatise to the causes of fear and the reasons for becoming fearless. For both Monte and Duarte, fear can help in perfecting one's physical skills and enhancing one's body, but it can also become the enemy of the best athlete if it inhibits performance. Monte notes that "Fear can arise at two times: either before we come to the work, or when we are in it" The first type of fear is beneficial, because it motivates a person to exercise harder and avoid "immoderation in body and words" The second kind of fear is destructive, inhibiting performance.¹⁰

In the Book Two, Monte goes deeper into the consideration of various martial arts, especially those that are expected to be known by noblemen. He introduces the rules and terminology of jousting, describes the relevant equipment and provides advice on the training for tournaments. This part of Monte's treatise has been studied in the context of the medieval and Renaissance jousting in Iberia, and it corresponds to what we know from other sources, such as the descriptions of tournament competitions known as *pas-d'armes*, as well as jousting treatises by other authors.¹¹ Monte reiterates much of the material on wrestling, vaulting and athletics already introduced in the first part, which may necessitate going back and forth between the parts to check what Monte says on the subject earlier on. This task would have been made easier in the early printed copies that included a table of contents at the beginning of the work.

Book Three is the most theoretical, as it does not contain any discussion of physical exercises, instead, it offers general considerations on warfare. Monte also presents the ideal profiles of soldiers and commanders, as well as providing advice to commanders on choosing men as soldiers. Again, some of his observations repeat the things said in the early books. Thus, in Book One, Monte already advised aligning the soldiers according to their complexions, so that sanguines should be placed first, melancholics second, choleric third and phlegmatics last.¹² The same advice is repeated in Chapter Three of Book Three titled: "How a battle array should be ordered according to the complexions." But, whereas his observations on the placement in the first book take the form of brief notes, they are more developed in Book Three.¹³ He also develops the theme of age-specific exercise, arguing that every age has exercise that is most appropriate for it and that, although older people should refrain from imitating young ones, they are still worthy of admiration because "the old can thrive in strength of soul while failing in bodily strength"¹⁴ This is the penultimate sentence of the last section in the book, and, although Monte does not specify this, he seems to imply that the task of "preserving health" would involve some physical exercise. This exercise, however, should no longer be performed in public, to avoid shame and criti-

cism, because, for Monte, the preservation and enhancement of one's reputation are of paramount importance and an end towards which one would work in training various skills, quite apart from their application in combat.

WHAT SKILLS SHOULD THE IDEAL SOLDIER DEVELOP?

Monte's treatise is wide-ranging, as it includes instructions on cultivating not only the body, but also the mind. In Book Three, describing the arts and skills to be perfected by a future soldier, he gives a list, which may be haphazard (given the stream-of-consciousness nature of Monte's writing in general), but may be rather suggestive of Monte's priorities: literacy, swimming, wrestling, jumping, vaulting, fencing with various weapons, hunting, and "survival" or practical skills. The primacy of reading may be surprising, given Monte's general preoccupation with the martial side of physical culture, yet he justifies it as follows: "to improve one's military completeness, first it is commendable and useful to be learned in reading and writing, so that we can read and understand histories and the deeds of other men, and by our own hand create even better ones, and to use our literacy to help us understand secret matters."¹⁵

Swimming, of course, has the immediate practical application of crossing rivers and other bodies of water, and the importance of wrestling and fencing for a soldier is self-evident. Athletic jumping and horse vaulting are recommended because of the exercise they provide for the body, though in Book One Monte also underlines the fact that jumping is a useful skill for a soldier in getting over some barriers, ditches, and other obstacles on the field of battle.

In describing the benefits of hunting, Monte, unlike his Portuguese predecessors João I and Duarte I, focuses not on the aspect of danger but on the scouting skills this activity trains, writing that, "In addition to accustoming our body to effort, hunting teaches us to work with the landscape, at times pursuing our course by the straight path, at other times wandering by the mountains, crossing rivers, ravines, ponds, marshes, and other such places, ascending and descending cliffs, trees, structures, and bridges, and doing similar things pertinent to military activity. It also teaches us to endure cold and heat, to look after our gear, and to care for and control animals."¹⁶

Finally, and somewhat surprisingly, Monte describes some practical skills that one would have expected a knight would possess. "He should know how to make arms, and how to repair his gear, saddle, and other things pertaining to him and his horse, when something is wrong with them."¹⁷ It seems that by Monte's time, at least judging by his depreciating remarks about idleness, over-indulgence in food, drinks, gambling and other courtly distractions, young noblemen would have had little leisure for these less glamorous activities. Dom Duarte makes a similar complaint about young men indulging in dances and games when they should practice riding, but it is hard to judge about the decline of physical fitness over the course of the fifteenth century based on these complaints only. It may be that both Duarte and Monte are looking back

nostalgically to a golden age where people were fitter, stronger, more honest and virtuous, using this as rhetorical device or imagining a past that never existed.

MONTE'S SUCCESSORS

Over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, more treatises were published, devoted to swimming, horse vaulting, fencing, riding and other subjects covered in the *Collectanea*, but these discussions, generally more systematic than Monte's, are far less holistic in their approach to developing the human body, mind and spirit. Among these treatises, Francis Willughby's *Book of Games* includes many athletics contests described by Monte, including throwing the bar and pole vaulting.¹⁸ Equestrian vaulting is described in numerous later treatises, such as Giocondo Baluda's *Volteggiare* (c. 1630), William Stokes's *Vaulting Master* (1641), and Johann Georg Paschen's *Voltiger* (1660), to name but a few.¹⁹

A late-nineteenth-century counterpart to Monte's treatise on the cultivation of human body and spirit is the legacy of Colonel Thomas Monstery, a fencing and boxing instructor who published works on these arts as well as a series of articles on swimming.²⁰ Like Monte, Monstery argued for a holistic approach to developing the body in a functional manner through the practice of applied exercises, mainly of martial origin and application: fencing with various weapons, including the rapier and the quarterstaff, boxing, swimming and horse riding. According to Monstery, these exercises would not only develop functional muscle groups, but also enhance flexibility, agility and general well-being, priorities that were high on the list of late medieval and early modern authors, notably Dom Duarte and Pietro Monte. This is hardly surprising, as all of them approached the subject of physical culture from the perspective of becoming a perfect soldier. The line of continuity from Monte to Monstery is further strengthened by the fact that, during his career, the chivalric spirit of Monstery's accomplishments was emphasized by contemporary press. Thus, one of the public contests or "assaults-of-arms" in which Monstery fought was advertised as a "knightly tournament."²¹ Although conducted on foot and with different arms, the range of weapons used by Monstery would have impressed Pietro Monte who argued that "above all we should learn something with every weapon"²² Monstery's emphasis on boxing without gloves also would have found favor with Monte, who recommended studying "the art of wrestling, for this skill teaches many others." Exercise cultivating the body for certain tasks, developing agility and flexibility rather than increasing muscle mass is another point in common. Monstery speaks against gymnastics that would result on growing stronger, but less supple bodies.²³

Likewise, Monte, in describing the soldiers to be chosen for fighting, notes that "Extremely large men are rarely very vigorous on foot or on horseback," and advises against choosing heavy men for ongoing warfare.²⁴ Monte's emphasis is on avoiding extremes, on developing the body through exercise, consuming "temperate" foods in moderation and on cultivating the mind and the spir-

it as well as the body, because intelligence and presence of spirit are as necessary in military situations, as well as in sports contests, as physical ability and specific skills. In this, Pietro Monte's advice is surprisingly modern, for it captures the notion of a healthy lifestyle, of physical, mental and social fitness, which are particularly topical today, with the challenges imposed by Covid-19 on both athletes and people who want to stay active and healthy in this changing and challenging world.

NOTE This paper I use this translation of the *Collectanea*: Jeffrey L. Forgeng, trans. *Pietro Monte's Collectanea: The Arms, Armour and Fighting Techniques of a Fifteenth-Century Soldier* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2018).

2. Baldesar Castiglione, *Book of the Courtier. The Singleton Translation*. Ed. Daniel Javitch. (New York and London: Norton, 2002); See also: Forgeng, trans. *Pietro Monte's Collectanea*, Book I, 4.

3. Sydney Anglo, *The Man Who Taught Leonardo Darts. Pietro Monte and His Lost Fencing Book*, *Antiquaries Journal* 69 (1989): 261-278.

4. Sydney Anglo, *The Martial Arts of Renaissance Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 26.

5. For a comprehensive discussion of medieval children's physical activities, see Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). See also: Nicholas Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry: The Education of the English Kings and Aristocracy, 1066-1530* (London: Methuen, 1984).

6. For a history of swimming, see Nicholas Orme, *Early British Swimming, 55 BC – AD 1719* (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1983).

7. Boucicault's life is documented in D. Lalande, ed. *Le Livre des faits du bon messire Jehan le Maingre, dit Bouciquaut, mareschal de France et gouverneur de Jennes*. (Geneva: Droz, 1985).

8. Duarte I of Portugal, *The Book of Horsemanship*, trans. Jeffrey L. Forgeng, (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2016).

9. Dom João I, *Livro da Montaria*, in *Obras dos Príncipes de Avis*, ed. M. Lopes de Almeida (Porto: Lello & Irmão, 1981).

10. Forgeng, trans. *Pietro Monte's Collectanea*, Book I, 86.

11. See Noel Fallows, *Jousting in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia*. (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2011).

12. Forgeng, trans. *Pietro Monte's Collectanea*, Book I, 60-61.

13. Forgeng, trans. *Pietro Monte's Collectanea*, Book III, 200-201.

14. Forgeng, trans. *Pietro Monte's Collectanea*, Book III, 227.

15. Forgeng, trans. *Pietro Monte's Collectanea*, Book III, 208.

16. *Ibid.*

17. Forgeng, trans. *Pietro Monte's Collectanea*, Book III, 209.

18. David Cram, Jeffrey L. Forgeng and Dorothy Johnston, *Francis Willughby's Book of Games: A Seventeenth-Century Treatise on Sports, Games, and Pastimes*. (Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2003).

19. Giocondo Baluda, *Trattato del modo di volteggiare e saltare il cavallo di legno* (c. 1630); William Stokes, *The Vaulting Master, or, The Art of Vaulting* (London: I. Okes, 1641); Johann Georg Paschen, *Kurtze iedoch gründliche Beschreibung des Voltiger* (Sachsen: Melchior Oelschlegen, 1666).

20. Colonel Thomas Hoyer Monstery, *Self Defense for Gentlemen and Ladies. A Nineteenth-Century Treatise on Boxing, Kicking, Grappling, and Fencing with the Cane and Quarterstaff*. Ed. Ben Miller. (Blue Snake Books, 2015).

21. Ben Miller, "A Grand Assault-of-Arms in Old New York, directed by Col. Thomas Monstery," *Martial Arts, Weapons and Armour* (2015). Available from <https://outofthiscentury.wordpress.com/2015/04/09/a-grand-assault-of-arms-in-old-new-york-directed-by-col-thomas-monstery/>.

22. Forgeng, trans. *Pietro Monte's Collectanea*, Book III, 208.

23. Miller, "A Grand Assault-of-Arms in Old New York."

24. Forgeng, trans. *Pietro Monte's Collectanea*, Book III, 206-207.