

Destreza Translation and Research Project

The following document is a translation of a portion of Francisco Antonio de Ettenhard's *Compendio de los fundamentos de la verdadera destreza y filosofía de las armas* (Madrid, 1675). The original text in Spanish is from Spain's Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid.

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Translator's Note

The page numbers of the original Spanish text are bolded and marked in brackets within the translation.

Illustration Note

The illustrations have been redrawn by Puck Curtis.

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COMPENDIUM OF THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE TRUE ART AND PHILOSOPHY OF ARMS.

TRUTH

BREVITY

Dedicated
to the Catholic, Sacred,
and Royal Majesty of the
King, Our Lord
Don Carlos II.
Monarch of Spain
and the Indies.

SCIENCE

ART

By Don Francisco Antonio de Ettenhard,
Knight of the Order of Calatrava.

With Privilege.
In Madrid: By Antonio de Zafra.
Year of 1675

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Illustrations by Puck Curtis

Chapter III. Concerning Techniques, Their Definition and Their Types.

A Technique is a disposition that the Swordsman constructs as an idea so that when realized in Action he is able to wound the opponent while assuring his own defense. In the judgment of the majority of Authors of this Science, the Techniques form a class containing infinite possibilities but with only five Techniques that are preeminent based on their ability to wound. These are the Circular Cut, the Circular Reverse, the Half **[page 32]** Cut, the half Reverse, and the Thrust. It is necessary to know these Techniques and their types. Thus, since the purpose of this Science is for the Swordsman to secure his own defense and to execute his offense against the opponent (in a way that supports his defense),¹ it is certain that only these five Techniques constitute the offense, and the Swordsman will only have to prepare to defend against them. Thus, even though the possible dispositions precede the action, we need only consider the defense for the five Techniques which can wound, and there is no need to prepare a defense against the others which cannot cause injury. Both the Circular Cuts and the Circular Reverses can be broken down into three types which are the Vertical, Diagonal and Horizontal. There is only one type of Thrust because it is formed with a single Forward Movement. The names for all these Techniques are taken from the lines in which they are executed. To further clarify, **[page 33]** we will identify these types of attacks and the relevant lines in the Art of Defense on the Figure of a man which indicates where the attacks are delivered. This is described by don Luis Pacheco de Narváez, and although he does not show a Figure, he clearly stated his intention to do so. We should pay particular attention to each of the Movements that compose the Techniques and differentiate between the Movements that prepare the strike and the ones that actually deliver the attack.

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¹ This is one of the most commonly stated fencing maxims restated with a more defensive emphasis, so that "to strike without being struck" becomes "to defend and strike with defense."

lengthy and possibly confusing explanation. Therefore, the Vertical Circular Cut is executed on the left Vertical Line marked by the letter (C) and falls with a Natural Movement in a straight and perpendicular line. It is named for the Line in which it is executed.

The same is true for the Circular Reverse, **[page 38]** only differentiating itself because it is performed in the Vertical Line of the right side. Where it should be executed is indicated by the (B). Note that they can also be done in the Diametrical Line shown by the letter (A), which is also called Vertical. The Diagonal Circular Cuts and Reverses strike in the Diagonal Lines crossing the Face (D) or (E) with the distinction that the Circular Reverse strikes from the right eyebrow to the left side of the chin and the Circular Cut from the left eyebrow to the right side of the chin. They are named for the Lines in which they are delivered.

The Horizontal Circular Cuts and Reverses are performed in the Horizontal Line, marked in the Illustration by the letters (J) and (K). Because the Horizontal Circular Cuts and Reverses are dangerous for the Swordsman executing them, they are uncommon in the True Art of Defense.

It seems that we have sufficiently explained everything about the Illustration: the types of Circular Cuts and Circular Reverses, the **[page 39]** Lines where they are executed, and how their names correspond to these lines. Now, it is necessary to describe the formation of the Techniques because it seems to me that the declaration of these principles would be incomplete if we only knew that the Techniques could be performed and the points where they were delivered while ignoring how they should be executed. Thus, I will give the appropriate information to make it as clear and easily understood as possible.

The Vertical Circular Cut is formed with a Circular action or Movement that is mixed, combining three simple types of Movement. For example, the Swordsman, starting from the position of the Right Angle, wants to create this Circle. He starts to form an Offline Lateral Movement to his left side, and while in progress, he raises the Sword with a Violent Movement into the High Line and then lowers the Sword with a Natural Movement, delivering the attack. In this way, one **[page 40]** action is composed of three simple types of Movement which are the Offline Lateral and the Violent Movements that chamber the attack; and the Natural one that delivers the cut.

The Circular Reverse is formed in the same way and is composed of the same Movements. The only difference is that it begins with an Offline Lateral Movement to the right side, and the attack is executed in the opponent's right Vertical Line.

The Diagonal Circular Cuts and Reverses are executed in the same way as the Verticals, except that the Sword should be inclined to the line of the right side (if it is making a Circular Cut) when the Sword reaches the extreme of the High Line. It is executed with the Mixed Movement combining the Aligning Lateral and Natural Movements. If it is a Circular Reverse, the Sword inclines to the left side and the strike is executed with the Mixed Movement mentioned previously, crossing the opponent's face as is shown in the Illustration by the diagonal Lines that divide the square from one Angle to another.

If these Techniques are formed when the Swordsman's weapon is subjected, **[page 41]** they say that he should give preference to the Natural Movement over the Lateral to escape the subjection. This is irrelevant since the Swordsman does not separate his Sword from his opponent's. This can be clearly proved. If the adversary's subjection is made with the

Natural Movement, placing his Sword over the other weapon in equal degrees of strength, and if the Swordsman lowers his Sword to the Acute Angle, the adversary's Sword will follow, maintaining the same superior position subjecting my Sword. This finds us both in the Acute Angle with the subjection intact. In order to escape the subjection, an Offline Lateral Movement must first occur because it will decrease the degrees of strength of the opponent's Sword and defeat the subjection made with the Natural Movement. Following this advice, three things are achieved. The first is to allow a Movement. The second is an actual escape from the subjection. **[page 42]** And the last is that when the Sword leaves the subjection, the first Movement of the Circular Cut or Reverse has been made and requires only two more Movements to finish the Technique. This makes it clear that whether the Sword is subjected or free the Circular Cuts or Reverses should be composed of the same Movements already described, passing through the Obtuse Angle when the Sword rises with a Violent Movement. By not using the Natural Movement, the Swordsman also avoids the Acute Angle by definition. In spite of all these considerations, I say (as an absolute rule) that from the adversary's subjection (even if it is possible) the Skilled Swordsman should not use a Circular Cut or Reverse, nor a Half Cut or Reverse, nor a Thrust because of the obvious danger to the person who executes them. We will discuss this later and prove the truth and reason of this rule. Since we know it is a false assumption that attacking from the adversary's subjection is not dangerous, it is my opinion that **[page 43]** we can excuse the brevity of the discussion of the Techniques and their Movements when made from subjection.

The Half Cut and Half Reverse are each composed with two Movements: one that chambers and the other that delivers the attack. The Lateral Movement prepares the attack, and the Aligning Lateral executes it, with the difference that the Half Cut starts on the right side and the Half Reverse on the left side. These are classified as Horizontal attacks, and they are initiated when the opponent deflects the Sword. Their formation does not describe a Circle, nor a greater or lesser portion of a circular arc because the preparatory Movement goes along one Line and the Movement to deliver the attack returns along that same line. For this reason, these Techniques are not called Circular like the Vertical and Diagonal Circular Cuts and Reverses.

The Descending Blows are formed with two Movements, the Violent Movement that chambers the attack and **[page 44]** the Natural Movement that executes it. They are classified as Vertical attacks. However, because of the short distance the attack travels it lacks power in delivering the strike when it is only composed of two Movements. To execute the same attack with greater force it is necessary for the Swordsman to add two additional Sword Movements so that the total sum of Movements for the perfect Descending Blow is four, and three of these are dispositive (or preparatory) Movements and the final Movement that delivers the blow is executive. Two of the Movements are in the Forward Line and two are in the Rear Line. To chamber the perfect Descending Blow, first, raise the blade with a Violent Movement in the Forward Line; then passing to the Rear Line, let it fall with a Natural Movement. Now, to deliver the chambered Descending Blow, first, lift the blade in the Rear Line with a Violent Movement and pass into the Forward Line, delivering the more powerful attack with the final Natural Movement. Our Fencing Master warned that the Descending Blow made with only two Movements had little effect, and he recognized that its perfect

formation, with two Movements made between the combatants in the Forward Line and with two made behind the Swordsman, would result in a more rigorous attack.

The same is true for the Half Cuts and Half Reverses. **[page 45]** For their execution to be perfect, they should also be formed with two more Movements which are the Aligning Lateral and the Offline Lateral that correspond to the Rear Line. Therefore, the perfect Half Cuts and Reverses are composed of four Movements. First, make an Offline Lateral toward the Rear Line. Then, pass into the Rear Line with an Aligning Lateral that approaches the extension of the diameter in the Rear Line. Next, return to the Forward Line with an Offline Lateral, and reaching the Forward Line, deliver the strike with an Aligning Lateral. To execute these Techniques with skill and perfection, follow the instructions provided. We have now described the important information about the Techniques that strike with cuts, specifically the Vertical and Diagonal Circular Cuts and Reverses, the Half Cuts and Reverses, and the Descending Blows. We have also explained the Movements that compose these Techniques and that are required to deliver the blow successfully with the necessary rigor, with the Half Cuts and Reverses and the Descending Blows each being composed of four Movements—three dispositive and one executive. **[page 46]** Now, we should discuss the Thrust, including how it is formed and what Movement is needed to execute it.

The Thrust is formed with the Forward Movement, not needing any other to prepare it. It alone is the preeminent Movement, and no other simple Movement can constitute the Thrust. Because the Swordsman starts in the Right Angle with the weapon pointed at the opponent's body, his strike requires only a single Movement, carrying the entire body forward. However, if the Swordsman finds himself with his point offline, that is to say with the tip not pointing directly at his opponent, the Thrust will be a Mixed Movement. The type of Mixed Movement depends on the initial position of the Sword. If it is high, the Movement will combine the Natural and Forward Movements because the Swordsman lowers the blade to direct the point toward the adversary and moves forward simultaneously to execute the strike. If the Sword starts low, the Mixed Movement will combine **[page 47]** the Violent and Forward Movements, and if the Sword is initially offline to either side, it will combine the Aligning Lateral and Forward Movements. The Thrust is composed of these Movements, but it is defined by the Forward Movement, even when this Movement is combined with another. For this reason, there is only one type of Thrust. Although the Thrust is given different names to describe the way it is formed, this does not change the fact that the Thrust is defined by the Forward Movement that is necessary to execute it. We can prove this with the following clear example. There are three ways to strike with a Thrust, and they are called the Circular, the Half Circular, and the Quarter Circular Thrusts. Now, we will explain each one of these terms in greater detail so that they are more easily understood and more clearly support the truth of our previous statement.

The Swordsman forms the Circular Thrust² when his Sword is deviated to the right side from the line to the opponent's body by the adversary's *atajo* **[page 48]** on the inside line. The Skilled Swordsman is forced to circle the weapon under the opponent's guard, and the

² A circular thrust in classical fencing is the same motion as the deceive, which is a circular attack used to elude a circular parry, although it might be more correct to call it a disengagement from the adversary's engagement to your own followed by an attack.

blade travels a complete Circle so that it ends the Movement where it started and strikes the original target with a Thrust. The Technique takes its name from the circular Movement that precedes the executive one, but it is defined as a Thrust because the Forward Movement is the essential element in the attack. The Half Circular Thrust³ only forms half a circle, and the Quarter Circular Thrust only completes a fourth of a circle. Even though they are formed this way and are given these names, the strike should be delivered with a Forward Movement and not with any other. It should be considered an infallible truth that of the six simple types of Movement (Violent, Natural, Aligning Lateral, Offline Lateral, Forward and Backward) only three have the ability to strike. As **[page 49]** has been stated, these are the Natural, Aligning Lateral and Forward Movements, as well as the Mixed ones that combine these simple Movements with other ones. I have now provided all the important information about the Techniques. This includes the definition of a Technique and its types, the explanation of the Lines of attack and how they are named, the way to form the Techniques, the number of Movements that compose them, which Movements can be used to strike, and which Movements chamber the strike. With these essential elements covered, we can now set aside this topic. Next, it will be advisable to discuss Footwork, including its definition and types. It is necessary for the Swordsman to understand the Footwork to successfully perform these Techniques because Footwork is the means by which the Techniques are executed and is one of the most fundamental principles of our Science.

³ The half circular thrust in classical fencing is called an attack by disengagement.