

VOM SCHÄFERIDYLL ZUR REVOLUTION

Europäische Tanzkultur im 18. Jahrhundert



2. Rothenfelder Tanzsymposion

21.—25. Mai 2008

Tagungsband

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von

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Für unseren Tagungsband wurde sie mit einem roten Halsband versehen:
Mit diesem Erkennungszeichen durfte man bestimmte Bälle besuchen, wenn
(mindestens) ein Familienangehöriger auf der Guillotine hingerichtet worden war.

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An 18th-Century Venetian *Moresca*

Popular Dance, Pyrrhic, or Regulated Competition?

BARBARA SPARTI

In the city-republic of Venice, starting in the Middle Ages, two factions – known as the »Castellani« and the »Nicolotti« – came into being on either side of the Grand Canal.¹ During the 16th and 17th centuries, craftsmen and laborers from the two opposing factions confronted each other in various kinds of contests and trials of strength. These included a »battle of fists«, gondola regattas², a tower or pyramid of men called the *Strengths of Hercules*, and also a *moresca*.

The »battles of fists« took place on Sundays and holidays from the Feast of the Assumption (August 15) until Epiphany (January 6).³ Particular bridges were used, a favorite that of San Barnaba which still has the footmarks where the contestants lined up. Originally the combatants used sticks, but by 1610, as the engraving by Giacomo Franco documents (see Appendix 3, figs. 1 and 2), »the battle, because of the detrimental consequences caused by excesses with sticks, is [now] confined to fists.«⁴ However, even these often degenerated into brawls, and drownings were not uncommon.⁵ The nobility, of both sexes, actively enjoyed watching the fist battles, the men occasionally participating themselves or through their servants, or donating their patronage.⁶

For the Castellani and Nicolotti, the battle of the fists was fought to bring honor, pride and public recognition to their faction; an unusual situation for ordinary workers at a time and place when this kind of »assertion and display was typically the preserve of social elites«⁷. The complete anarchy and rowdiness of the battles »continually provoked the Venetian state to bring the event under some kind of control«⁸. Thus, temporary and unsuccessful bans continued while at the same time the Republic supported pre-planned and »war-like encounters« ever hopeful of gaining the political and economic support of the factions.⁹ Moreover, the contests, often staged for Venetian ceremonies and foreign officials, made a lively show and spread good propaganda about the aggressiveness of Venetians to visiting dignitaries. This was especially important starting in the 17th century as the Republic's diplomatic and economic fortunes continued to decline.

The last »battle of the fists« was fought in 1705 at which time the majority of Venetians, and especially the nobility, had grown tired of them. Even the same Castellani and Nicolotti now threw their energies into the Hercules pyramids.¹⁰ The human tower or *Strengths of Hercules* was supposed to have originated in Venice in the 13th century, though our first document is from much later. In the 16th century, the *Strengths of Hercules* was traditionally performed as part of Venice's official carnival celebration on »Fat« or Maundi Thursday, and by the mid-18th century, if not earlier, the celebration also

included a spectacular »flight of a winged man« (also known as »the flight of the Turk«) from St. Mark's bell tower to the doge's balcony (fig. 3), and ended with grandiose fireworks. Though still daylight, the fireworks, initially, gave the nobility time to dress for the ball at the ducal palace. The pyramids were built by squads of young men often on platforms in different »piazze« or placed on barrels or boats in the lagoon (fig. 4). The two factions competed to erect ever-more complex and higher structures. At every contest, each team showed six different pyramids. Several volumes preserved in the Venetian State Archives contain over 500 drawings of different pyramids actually performed by Castellani and Nicolotti between the years 1750 and 1816, with fanciful names such as *The superb Emperor*, *Mohammed's cask*, *The Lion* (fig. 5).

At some date, a moresca was apparently also part of the »Fat Thursday« festivities, performed on the stage following the Hercules pyramids, and though referred to by almost every 19th- and 20th-century author (in the briefest of terms), no primary source or contemporary description is ever given.¹¹

By the end of the 17th century, the once powerful Serenissima which had ruled over much of Italy, the Adriatic, and the Mediterranean, had lost all its former grandeur. Sociologists, like Peter Burke, point out that Venice became the playground of Europe and tourism became her major source of income. Carnival became commercialized, and the nobility organized their own, separate, Carnival balls and festivities. The »Fat Thursday« games had also changed and lost much of their spontaneous reveling character, becoming more regulated and »professional«, including year-round athletic practice accompanied by a kind of »job attitude«. The games were now »staged authenticity«¹². In 1797, the one thousand years of the Venetian Republic came to an end with Napoleon's suppression and the subsequent domination by Austria that lasted until the unity of Italy in 1861. According to one well-known Venetian author writing in 1817, during the first 20 years of Austrian domination, the »Fat Thursday« celebrations did not take place.¹³ However, documents confirm that contests between the Nicolotti and the Castellani, in particular the *Strengths of Hercules*, and the moresca, did occur at regular intervals at least until 1816, though not specifically at Carnival.¹⁴

The Moresca

There is a long and complex history of the moresca in Italy. It was performed for the most part in the 15th and 16th centuries, usually as an interlude in courtly banquets and plays. The term meant many things and above all a pantomimed »ballet« in costume, often allegorical or exotic (featuring heroes like Jason or a fire-spewing dragon). Moresca also could indicate a sword or mock-battle dance, usually for four combatants, and common in Renaissance artisan plays.¹⁵

The *moresca* that I will be discussing is one that was performed by Castellani and Nicolotti in the late 18th century (if not earlier), one that does not resemble any of these former *morescas*. It was, according to an 1829 Dictionary of Venetian Dialect,

type of popular combat or fight performed for public festivities in Venice between the rival factions of the Nicolotti and the Castellani, when they competed in public, showing off their athletic exercises. It was performed by many young men from the lowest strata of the common people [...] [who with blunt dagger-like swords] circled round as if in a dance or playing at fencing, giving well-aimed blows and thrusts at each measured step and at every movement; and thus skirmishing, they caroused and reveled, amusing themselves and the spectators.¹⁶

The »*morescantì*« were led by a master who stood alone in the circle's center. There is no mention or suggestion of music. There are no particular steps. The »*moresca*« is rarely referred to as a dance.

W h e n this specific *moresca* was born we do not know. It is quite probable that it grew out of the spontaneous *morescas* which took place as part of the one- to three-day exuberant celebrations by one or both factions held near the bridges following a Battle of the Fists. In an anonymous year-by-year chronicle of the bridge battles from 1574 to 1670, references to the *moresca* appear five times.¹⁷ These are, unfortunately for dance historians, typically telegraphic: the *morescas* are simply »beaten« (or »fought«). Once, a platform-stage is mentioned in passing, and one *moresca* was particularly admired for its style and skill, though even more for the wonderful »liveries« (costumes). This last information was no doubt specified because it differed from the usual. None of these *morescas* was performed at Carnival, but followed the calendar of the Fist Battles, mid-summer through early winter. These spontaneous *morescas* performed after a victory of a fist battle confirm my hypothesis that the later *morescas*, those that took place in the period when »games of strength« were already well regulated, were arranged, like the »Towers of Hercules«, as a contest between Nicolotti and Castellani; that is, each faction or team performing its own separate *moresca*.

Sources for the Venetian *Moresca*

The two main sources for the 18th-century *moresca* are a set of seven colored pen-and-ink drawings that illustrate the principal parts of the »*Giuocho*« (or »*Game*«) of the *moresca*¹⁸, and a detailed (»*Exact*«) Description of *How to easily perform the moresca with all its movements and commands* (see Appendix 2). These are found in two of the volumes containing the hundreds of drawings of the *Strengths of Hercules* pyramids performed in specific years between 1750 and 1816 and, as we shall see shortly, furnish us with enough material to begin reconstructing the *moresca*. Among the other sources I have thus far turned up, and that shed further light on the *moresca*, are two illustrations with

captions showing Nicolotti performing the moresca on the ice in January 1788 when the lagoon froze over; and a 1759 newspaper article reporting the Nicolotti performing the moresca in Bologna during that city's most important non-religious holiday, la Festa della Porchetta – of the roast pork.

Judging by the presently known documentation, the moresca did not enjoy the popularity of either the Hercules pyramids or the gondola regattas, to say nothing of the earlier Battles of the Fists. However, an enthusiastic description of the moresca, almost certainly by an eyewitness, adds another dimension to the previous sources. It is far less objective, and hence in some ways less reliable as a document; but its subjectivity lends a quality of emotion and realism. It is included in a printed account of sumptuous Venetian entertainments held in 1641 to honor a gentleman from Pesaro on his appointment as Procurator, a distinguished honorary position in the Doge's government.¹⁹ After the ball and banquet,

a barbarous game began with some men dressed in Arabic costume, nimble of hand, fast of foot, who, armed with swords in their right hand, turned now the back [of the sword], now the front, now turned [themselves] rapidly, now jumped swiftly, now pursued the fugitive, now the pursuers fleeing. After this another one [another moresca], not less wonderful, followed. After all these had danced for some time, gracefully moving the foot according to the music, whether grave or agitated [»concitata«], going slow or fast,

we are given a short description of the building up of a »Hercules tower«:

four on the ground, joining hands, stomachs up, and others climbing up above these making a strange knot, and erecting excellent and marvelous and lofty human walls [my emphases].

It is significant that this author (who by his amazement at what he sees, indicates that he is quite surely not a Venetian) is more impressed with the sword exhibition (never called moresca!) than with the tower. Is this unique impression possibly because he had already seen the latter? His account of the tower is brief and unintelligible. Not so for the sword play. While we do not understand formations, numbers, or figures, we do get a special insight, a definite feel for it. Here we also have a reference, present in one other source, that documents the performance of two different morescas, one after the other. The purpose of this account was to impress both the Venetians and the readers »back home« with the magnificence of the occasion, and the great expense undertaken by the honored gentleman himself. Publication ensured further renown and prestige. Given this, it is difficult to know how much of the account we can trust. Indeed, historians tend to regard this type of publication with a certain diffidence.²⁰ Questions that remain to be answered are: Was this »moresca« truly danced to music? Did it indeed come before the Hercules tower? (Since all other references, except for one, have the moresca following the tower.) And what of these »Arabic« costumes not referred to elsewhere? Could there be a connection here with the »liveries« admired after the bridge battle twenty years later?

Description of the Moresca

Let us turn now to »the Exact description of the game of the Moresca«. This appears in the eighth and last »article« of a register (dealing for the most part with regattas) in one of the volumes of Hercules pyramid illustrations from 1750 to 1816. The fact that various volumes of drawings also include registers that list the statutes for the competitions, the captains, the patrons, the participants, the winners (and their prizes) from both factions, year by year, is indeed a confirmation that these »games of strength« were well-regulated. What is curious is that while Castellani and Nicolotti are mentioned in the various preceding sections of the register, this Description of the moresca never mentions either faction. Does that mean that they both had to perform the same moresca? If so, did it change from year to year? With the Towers of Hercules, each team showed six different pyramids, the names of which are repeated irregularly over the years. That the Description and the seven drawings are unique records of the same moresca suggests that they were meant to preserve or highlight a specific event. Was this then an unusually successful moresca?

The seven part-names in the Description are the same as those of the captions for the »moresca-game« illustrations. These tinted drawings (fig. 6) are dated 1815 and signed by »the amateur P. V.« who also is the illustrator of at least four of the collections of Hercules pyramid drawings.²¹ His style is very personal and easily recognizable. All the participants have black tassel caps and sashes labeling them (since the Castellani wore red) as Nicolotti, which is confirmed on the title page of the drawings: »the Game of Moresca as performed by the Signori Nicolotti«. Furthermore, the moresca participants are dressed exactly like the Hercules pyramid-builders – in the normal clothes of an 18th-century gondolier or Venetian commoner – and not as Arabs, or in any special »livrea«, or, as in other moresca-type dances, in the imitation dress of ancient soldiers.

According to the Description in the register, the moresca was performed by 8, 16 or, as in our drawings, 24 participants facing each other in concentric circles.²² Each man holds a »mela corta«, a »short apple« or special short sword. There is a captain or master who appears to be calling and directing each of the seven Parts. (The same personage, who was trainer, caller and legal representative, existed for the Hercules pyramids,²³ for urban artisan morescas from the early 1600s in Rome where they were known as »caporale«²⁴, and is still found today in a traditional combat dance from the island of Ischia.²⁵) Each of the seven Parts is made up of a different number and different kinds of sword »beats« or blows which can be high or low (occasionally indicated as »to the head« and »to the feet«), as well as right, or forehand, and reverse. The action almost always commences with one's facing opponent. To begin, the captain calls »Alert«, »Attention«, »Arms«, or »Moresca«.

It is not the purpose of my paper to present an analysis of this moresca (which I have done elsewhere²⁶). At that time I conferred with Patri Pugliese, early dance colleague and expert in swordsmanship who, sadly, died last year. I asked him to help clarify terms like »dritto, dritta« (right and straight) but obscurely used in this description

to mean both a right- or forehand stroke and the opponent on the right side.²⁷ I will quickly take you through the seven Parts, highlighting some problems connected with the »reading« and interpreting of the drawings and Description.

- The First Part, or »Action«, is a kind of introduction consisting of »six beats«. Starting with the Second Part (15 beats; fig. 7), which however is called »First«, the opponents begin to circle to the right, one beat for each in the manner of a haye, weaving in and out with the swords. It is not clear what the drawing here indicates: why do all the participants have one of their hands raised, and why do half have their swords in their left hands? Was this a variation? Or a result of the artist's limited ability? There are other unresolved questions to do with, for example, line of direction. The Third Part, or »Turkish Cut« (fig. 8), is composed of nine beats and starts going to the left. There is high-low exchange standing still, and an exchange of places (in or out) and a final pretend beat (Pugliese calls this a »pulled blow«)²⁸ at which all defend themselves by bringing their left arm up in front of their forehead.²⁹
- Part 4 is called »Kneeling« (fig. 9) and is made up of 16 beats. On the fourth beat all go down on one knee, still facing one another, rising on the fifth. The tenth and twelfth beats, chosen by P. V. to illustrate this part, are done under the leg, alternated with high beats. The final beat is a turn of the body ending on one knee with the sword lowered onto the ground. Note that in this drawing, half the combatants, those on the left in each couple, have their sword in their right hand and are on their left knee, while the other half are on their right knee with their sword in their left hand. Was this intentional? There is no way to tell from the drawing who is outside and who is inside, except, perhaps, by the four side couples. (This is the same problem that appeared in the Second Part.) Indeed, the written instruction, stated only in Parts 4 and 5, is equally ambiguous: finding »yourselves half in and half out«. Since the moresca's formation is two concentric circles, what does this specification mean? That half the participants are inside and half on the circumference, which we already know, or that all are half in and half out, that is, neither out nor in, but in a single circle? (An alternating of concentric circles and a single circle occurs in the *Moreska* done on the island of Korcula in Croatia.) Since the drawings are inconsistent, they do not help here: in Part 4 (as in Parts 2 and 3), the combatants are all facing each other (presumably in a single circle), while in Parts 1, 5, 6, and 7, half the opponents have their backs to us.
- Part 5 (fig. 10) is »Posae« or »le passae«, possibly indicating »passing« figures. Another obscure term, found here and elsewhere, is »turning«/»turn« (»girando«). Turning oneself or circling in the circle?
- Part 6 is named (fig. 11) for the final »under the leg« beat. The drawing, here unambiguous, has all the combatants raising their right leg and using their right arms. However, the figure on the left has his sword under his thigh – in a reverse, while his opponent on the right has his sword on the outside of his leg in a straight cut.

- The Seventh and last Part is the »Surrender« (fig. 12) which includes the »Turkish Cut« figure done four times and the »stoccada« (»pulled blow«) three times. Then, »mov[ing] only the right arm backwards giving a »blow« on your adversary's [weapon], one that he will really feel«, it proceeds with a single step before finishing with the sequence of the »Italian [capture]« in which the losers – who fought on the inside and who are now on the outside – go down on one knee begging for clemency, while the winners place one of their feet on the losers' knees, pretending to strike them with their swords.

The Master could then call »go back« which allowed the *moresca* to be repeated up to three times.

Like the Korcula *Moreska* and Arbeau's 16th-century *Bouffons*, the Venetian *moresca* has a refrain-pause section in between the figures. It is called »Repose Arms« or »Presas«, which I translate as »Ripresa« and is made up of two beats only (done »with great fear«) and repeated as long as the captain wishes.³⁰ Pugliese pointed out that the function is to get the dancers back into sequence should they get mixed up or make a mistake.

Other sources

In yet another of the large volumes dedicated to illustrations of the Hercules pyramids³¹, at the very end of the Nicolotti section (following the year 1816), a folio (38^v) has been inserted with a drawing (fig. 13) which is clearly by another artist.³² We see a rather simple pyramid composed of only 16 men (many of the towers used 28–40 men), and on the ground are 16 swords. The caption reads:

Game of the strengths [of Hercules] performed by the Signori Niccolotti and no other, in 1788 on the ice near the island of San Secondo [...] after which sixteen of the same Nicolotti courageously fought [»battuta«] the *moresca*.

The lagoon had frozen over on the 28th of December 1788 due to exceedingly rigid temperatures, stranding eight passengers in their gondola. They were attempting to reach Mestre (the mainland) on foot, and were joined, over the next two-and-a-half weeks, by hundreds of Venetians who came out of curiosity, to help, to provide food, building fires, and setting up temporary inns on the ice. On 15 January the Nicolotti amused a huge crowd of spectators by performing the »*Strengths of Hercules* [...] also adding, at the end, the game of the *moresca*«, defined by the local »*Gazzetta*«, which also published this engraving (figs. 14 and 15),³³ as »a kind of military exercise in which they showed dexterity and great prowess«. Note the absence of the figure of the captain. Was he present only for »official« contests? In the etching there are several unexplained figures who are not holding swords and seem to be going in and out among the combattants.

Another »*Gazzetta*« (4 September 1759), this from the city of Bologna, reports that on 26 August 1759, during Bologna's most important non-religious holiday, the »Festa della Porchetta« – of the roast pork, the Nicolotti company from Venice performed two

morescas in the main square. Thus we know that not only did the factions practice their morescas so as to take part in Venetian contests, but they performed, and »went on tour«, and presumably received payment for their spectacle.³⁴

Looking back over our documents, can we date the moresca described in the register? How do P. V.'s drawings, dated 1815, help us? Do they refer to a moresca performed that year? Most of the volumes containing the Hercules drawings were completed in 1816, but refer to towers presented starting in 1750. All the drawings in each volume seem to me, inasmuch as the hand doesn't change, to have been made at the same time, not year by year. Most of the »towers« were performed in the 1750s, 60s, and 70s. The Nicolotti performed their moresca in Bologna in 1759 and on the ice in 1788. Given this, and P. V.'s date of 1815, I can conclude that the moresca depicted in the drawings, and that of the Description in the register whether describing the exact same moresca or a different one, was performed some time between 1750 and 1815, and most probably between 1750 and 1790. A good question to follow up is: Why were all the volumes, replete with statutes and regulations, made around 1816, 19 years after the end of the Republic? Was a kind of revival planned? Was this in part a political statement? A memorial to the past? And why are the documented morescas (on the ice, in Bologna, in the drawings, and even those following the fist battles) never attributed to the Castellani? Does this have anything to do with why they may have been performed less than the Hercules towers which always featured both factions?

Demise of the moresca

We do not know when the Venetian moresca died out. No attempt was made to revive it after the unification of Italy fifty years later.³⁵ The 19th- and 20th-century writers who have commented on it, have mostly done so without ever having seen it, and none has analyzed it. Giustina Renier Michiel wrote her *Origins of Venetian Festivities* in 1817. Coming from an aristocratic and cultivated family that produced numerous doges, she herself would probably not have been interested in such a plebeian »sport«. However, writing while under hateful Austrian domination, her fervent nationalism undoubtedly colored her memories of the moresca, turning it into an offspring of the ancient pyrrhic. Those authors who followed, the most recent a highly respected Venetian art historian writing in 1983, imitated Renier Michiel or, not finding other information, accepted generic definitions of moresca. Believing there to be one type of moresca only, they have assumed that, rather than another contest of strength, like the gondola regattas, the Hercules towers, and the battle of fists, »our« moresca was simply a mock battle dance, related to the ancient Greek pyrrhic, whose name came from the Moors or Saracens.³⁶ Renier Michiel and Tassini (writing originally in 1890) both note that the moresca began slowly and accelerated (both »feet and hands«), and ended in a kind of »furore«. Again, one wonders if this is poetic justice or an accurate description. Tassini adds that it was performed without music; at most a drum.

The most obvious question that remains unanswered is why was the 18th-century *moresca* so much less documented than the *Strengths of Hercules*, in, for example, travelers' diaries and Venetian chronicles, and especially iconographically, if we compare the over 500 drawings of the pyramids with the seven of the *moresca*. Can we be sure that this is an indication that it was less popular? Could the few drawings have something to do with the difficulty of depicting the different figures and sword beats, especially in comparison to the static finale of the pyramids? Does the absence of government encouragement or censure regarding the sword fight during the 16th and 17th centuries, present instead for the fist battles, tell us anything about the *moresca*? Did its being »fought« a m o n g members of the same faction rather than b e t w e e n factions make it less violent and exciting to watch? Did the demands to rehearse and »set« it take away aggressiveness and daring?

* * *

By way of conclusion, I include a table based on comparisons of the Venetian *moresca* with Arbeau's *Bouffons* and the Korcula *Moreska* (see Appendix 1). Many of the similarities – such as the number of parts – may, of course, be coincidental, though the pause-circling refrain in each version seems a significant common denominator. It is also worth keeping in mind that Korcula was long under Venetian domination. As regards the ambiguity of the definition of the *moresca* as dance and/or game, the following description of the Korcula *Moreska* by Czech ethnographer F. Pospisjl in 1929 (he had observed it 17 years earlier), is interesting:

The combat takes place in the form of a g a m e with swords which the d a n c e r s hold in their hand [...] Some figures have fallen into disuse because of the great difficulty the a c t o r s find in performing them.³⁷

Notes

- 1 These comprised the inhabitants of the »contrade« [neighborhoods] of Castello and San Marco on the one hand, and San Polo, Cannareggio and Santa Croce on the other. The parishes of Dorsoduro (initially »Castellani«) were divided between the two. By the mid-1500s, boundaries had become fairly fixed for the next 200 years. The origins of the passionate rivalry between the Castellani (also called »Arsenalotti«) and the Nicolotti, one group supposedly arriving in Venice by land, the other from the sea, is obscure and reputed to date back to the very early Middle Ages. Various legends provided convenient mythical frameworks for the unrelenting hostility between the factions. See SPARTI: *An 18th-century Venetian »Moresca«*, pp. 104f., for a brief discussion of these. Robert C. Davis, in his excellent 1994 historical-anthropological study, *The War of the Fists* (pp. 19–23), suggests economic, occupational, and status reasons for the enduring antagonisms, such as »a traditional antipathy between fishermen and shipbuilders«.
- 2 DAVIS: *The War of the Fists*, p. 15, reports regattas in 1369. These were not exclusive to the Castellani and Nicolotti.
- 3 Ibid, p. 14, points out that »lotta dei Pugni« or »guerra dei pugni«, ritual brawls for neighborhood supremacy [...] were held in many Italian communes since at least the 10th century where rival

bands of youths had battled for supremacy with fists, or stones, or wooden swords and shields« Davis' book is based, in the first place, on an anonymous, unpublished chronicle of almost 400 pages recounting in detail and year by year, the story of Venice's bridge battles from 1574 to 1670, the date in which the chronicle was terminated.

- 4 FRANCO: *Habiti d'Huomeni*. »Perchè si é passato a tanto eccesso di contesa che con i legni seguono spesso grandissimi inconvenienti, la battaglia è ridotta di pugnì, la qual cosa passa con molto diletto dei riguardanti, et con molto ardore dei combattenti« (TASSINI: *Feste Spettacoli divertimenti*, pp. 36f.). The sticks had been pointed at first and later blunted. G. Franco did the engravings in Fabritio Caroso's dance treatises.
- 5 In one skirmish, 21 people drowned in the canal below. The excitement of the bystanders was incited even more by the continuous playing of drums and loud wind instruments.
- 6 On 11 November 1664, the English traveler Philip Skippon entered the following in his diary: »St. Barnaby's bridge is noted for a fight at fisty-cuffs every *Sunday* in warm weather, between the *Castellani* and *Nicolitae* [sic], two factions maintained among the common people. The two parties meet on the top of the bridge, and beat one another with their fists only. Some are thrown down into the water, and others (but not often) are dangerously hurt; sometimes some are kill'd. Noblemen stand by, and encourage each side all the while«. SKIPPON: *A Collection of Voyages and Travels*, vol. 6 (1663/64).
- 7 DAVIS: *The War of the Fists*, p. 91.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 45.
- 9 *Ibid.*, pp. 140—143. Venetian policy continued to allow the battles to give the plebs a chance to let off steam; to provide them with an opportunity to develop martial skills; and in the hopes of getting them to pay their taxes. Factionalism also meant that if one part attempted to raise its head in dissension to the government, the other side could be called on to immediately suppress the first signs of rebellion. *Ibid.*, p. 158.
- 10 These »human castles«, traditional in many countries, are still erected today in Catalonia. Padoan Urban (*Impresari macchinisti*«, p. 227, n. 5) reports that in the 18th century separate stages were set up for the Nicolotti and the Castellani. Padoan Urban's 1983 article, the most complete and documented report on the *Strengths of Hercules* to date, reproduces in color several 18th-century drawings of Nicolotti pyramids. As with the battle of the fists, there were frequent bans on the Hercules towers and in 1789 they too were prohibited, unless specifically authorized, because they often ended in brawls. At the same time they were often »staged« for visiting princes, including Napoleon.
- 11 For example, RENIER MICHIEL: *Origine delle feste veneziane*; TAMASSIA MAZZAROTTO: *Feste veneziane*; PADOAN URBAN: *Giochi veneziani*; BERTELLI: *Carnevale*.
- 12 BURKE: *Le carnaval à Venise*, pp. 56—61.
- 13 RENIER MICHIEL: *Origine delle feste veneziane*.
- 14 While the regattas continued, the *Strengths of Hercules* were not performed after 1816/20.
- 15 SPARTI: *The »moresca« and »mattaccino« in Italy*.
- 16 BOERIO: *Dizionario del dialetto veneziano*.
- 17 I am very grateful to Robert Davis who furnished me with the complete references to morescas in the Chronicle on which his book is based and which appear for the years 1574, 1634, 1635, 1639, and 1667.
- 18 Museo Correr di Venezia, Disegni A. I. 20—22, A. IV. 69, Cod. P. D. 67 A, Cod. Cicogna 3054/4,8,9.
- 19 *Gli Apparati Veneti ovvero le Feste fatte nell'elezione in procuratore dell'Illustrissimo et Ecc. Signor Giovanni da Pesaro Cavalier. Descritte da Domenico Vincenti, Venezia, presso Pietro Miloco*. ZORZI: *La vita quotidiana*, pp. 54, 58f., explains that the nine Procurators could be very important personages who were elected for life, but could also be elected to other posts in the government. More honorary than a proper office, it was, nevertheless, the highest position next to the Doge. The Procurators had little to do but supervise the treasure of the Basilica and look after the rights of widows and

orphans. It was the custom at every entry of a Procurator that there be grand festivities, and it was expected that the new Procurator would show great magnificence. Only those with their own sizeable income could afford the appointment. But its honor on one's family made it a very desirable post and the position was often »for sale«. The language in the account is extremely adulatory and flowery. The description of the *moresca* is on page 39.

- 20 See, for example, art historian BERTINI: *Le nozze di Alessandro Farnese*, p. 11, who points out in his commentary on the »livret« describing the marriage festivities of Alessandro Farnese in Bruxelles in 1565, that »there is a general diffidence surrounding this type of publication [...] and in order to evaluate its historic substance, a laborious task of verification is necessary«.
- 21 Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Scuole Piccole e Suffragi buste 738—742, here 738; Museo Correr di Venezia, Disegni A. I. 20—22, Cod. Cicogna 3054/9.
- 22 The Description states that half of the players must »concentre themselves«. Florio (*A Worlde of Wordes*) defines *concentrire* as circle within an orbe [circle], having the same superficies.
- 23 PADOAN URBAN: »*Impresari macchinisti*«; PADOAN URBAN: *Giochi veneziani*.
- 24 Several of these are reported in criminal court records now in the Rome State Archives. I wish to thank Prof. Elizabeth Cohen for sharing this material with me.
- 25 GALA: *Ndrezzata*.
- 26 SPARTI: *An analytical and comparative study*.
- 27 Pugliese and I came to the conclusion that »dritto« (masculine) is used here to mean a right- or forehand blow (opposite of a reverse). Pugliese pointed out that in the swordsmanship manuals, »dritto« is used »universally to indicate a shortened form of »mandritto« [...] for a blow going from right to left against the left side of your opponent« (personal correspondence, passim). »Dritta« (feminine and without the article »the«) here indicates the person diagonally across and to the right. We also dealt with the use of the word »beat« for »battuta« (every part is made of up so many »battute«). In modern fencing, »battuta« is a specific action with the sword, but because other alternatives – »blow« or »cut« – already occurred in the description, I chose to stay with »beat«.
- 28 Similar perhaps to the pretend »estocade« in *Bouffons*.
- 29 Pugliese confirms that in contemporary arms' manuals, »the left hand near the face for defense is quite common when there is no companion dagger«.
- 30 »Presas« is normally translated as »taking«, »prise«, or »reprisal« (FLORIO: *A Worlde of Wordes*), whereas »Reprise« meant »A renewed or alternating spell of action«.
- 31 Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Scuole Piccole e Suffragi buste 738—742, here 739.
- 32 This is confirmed by the different handwriting on the facing page.
- 33 The engraving, by Teodoro Viero, was published in the *Gazzetta* on 17 January 1789.
- 34 What instead did the Nicolotti get out of their show on the ice, thirty years later? Was it a spontaneous exhibition? Or one made to give them publicity? Was there a collection afterwards? How frequently was the *moresca* »performed« to audiences?
- 35 ROFFARE: *Curiosità veneziana*, pp. 98—103, writing in the early years of Fascism, notes that »during recent gatherings dedicated to [Italian] customs, in Venice and Rome, the squadron of Dopolavoro [free time] of Lagosta performed a fine reproduction of the ancient *Moresca*«. Lagosta (the Croatian coastal village of Lastovo) was under Italian domination between 1920 and 1947. Lastovo may have had its own kind of sword dance.
- 36 TASSINI: *Feste Spettacoli divertimenti*, p. 40; TAMASSIA MAZZAROTTO: *Feste veneziane*, p. 36; PADOAN URBAN: *Giochi veneziani*, p. 98; BERTELLI: *Carnevale*, p. 14.
- 37 POSPISJL: *La moresca*, IX: 1—8; my emphasis.

Appendix 1: Table

Bouffons	Moresca (Venice)	Moreska (Korcula)
1. mattachins – dance	game	game («igra») dance?
2. kicking steps: a »grève« & 2 »pieds en l’air« danced always	none	various
3. specific music	no music (NONE)	composed music (modernized- for brass band) with changing meters & tempi
4. no text (NONE)	no text (NONE)	dramatic text
5. ARBEAU: <i>Orchésographie</i> (1588)	drawings (1815) & descriptive text (18 th century?)	continuing tradition (with interruptions)
6. »masquerades«	»Fat Thursday« carnival & other occasions	holidays & for tourists (summer)
7. place not specified; not limited	Piazzetta San Marco; many other piazzas & outdoor spaces	outdoor spaces
8. four »soldiers or Amazons«	8, 16 or 24 contestants	24 black & white knights (Moors & Turks)
9. square or circle	2 concentric circles	2 concentric circles
10. »ancient« warriors	normal (holiday?) dress; special red or black sashes & hats	red & black »ancient warrior« costumes
11. one sword & shield; bells	one »mela corta« (»short apple« blunted sword)	2 swords each. Today blunted & once of different lengths
12.	»Captain« or »Master«	2 kings
13. Invitation & introductory »rondes«	command: »alerta« (or »arma« or »moresca«)	dramatic scene; armies enter; »sfida« challenge
14. »ronde«	»presa« – Riprese or »repose weapons«	walk – unnamed, & danced circling
15. »haut«, »revers haut«, »bas«, »revers bas«, »feint«, »estocade«	»dreto« (right), reverse, »colpo«- blow, »tagio«-cut, »la stoccada« (thrust) to the legs, to the head	CUTS & DEFENSE

Passages	parts	»kolap« (»colpe« Italian: strikes?)*
Intro./»Ronde« »Invitation«	1. Azion (Action) 6 battute	1. <i>Rujer 1. Ballo di sfida</i> (whites in/blacks out)
1. »Feint« [8 cuts x 4]	2. Prima (First) 15 batt »All'erta alla prima«	2. Moreska 2. <i>Rujer</i> (positions switched)
2. »3 Coups« [x 4]	3. Turkish Cut 9 battute	3. <i>Finta</i> (2 adversaries) <i>3. Moreska & finta</i>
3. »15« Coups [2 cuts only x 4]	4. Kneeling 12 battute	4+4. Moro indentro (blacks in) & parapie (blacks out)
4. »l'Estocade« [5 cuts x 4]	5. Passae (Passing?) 9 battute	5. Cross (jump, land on knees) <i>5. Spagnoletta</i> (old version)
5. »Bastion« [3 cuts x 4]	6. Sottogamba (Under the leg) 12 battute	6+6. <i>Rujer de for a via</i> (whites out-final kolap in old version)
6. »Haye« [2 cuts x 4]	7. Disarmo (Surrender) (repeat 3rd figure) initial positions are reversed. »Outs« are down on one knee. 74? battute (x 3)	7. Seventh »kolap« (final figure in »new« version) (variation of 4 th »kolap«) Blacks (inner circle) fall down & surrender

* Italics = older version of Moreska

Appendix 2

N.N.: *How to easily perform the moresca with all its movements and commands*

Articolo Ottavo. Esatta descrizione del gioco della Moresca Mostrando la maniera di facilmente eseguirla con tutte le sue mozioni e comandaisse (comandaire?) ec. ec.

Moresca

Trovandosi in n° pari otto – sedesi – o ventiquattro dovranno metà concentrarsi e meta rinfaciarsi l'uno in l'altro, ossia mezzi dentro e mezzi fuori. Quando il Capo Maestro chiamerà Alerta ovvero attenzione l'Arma o Moresca dovrà essere con la Punta rivolta a terra. Allora il sudetto Maestro Comanderà la prima Parte Chiamata Azion. Sono essa

composta di sei batute prima al risguardante senza muoversi al destro abasando l'arma a Dritta senza muoversi. Terza al risguardante senza muoversi quarta inalzando l'arma a dritta senza muoversi quinta al risguardante e sesta in atto di colpire pure il risguardante senza muoversi.

Parte seconda il Maestro chiamerà Prime Sono quindici Battute Prima al risguardante poscia si parte girando il corpo dalla parte del arma per dare la seconda in roverso a dritta Terza Caminando avanti. quarta in roverso a Dritta quinta avanti Sesta indietro dando il roverso a dritta. Settima avanti dala parte del'Arma. Ottava in roverso. Nona avanti e Decima avanti con due dreti [sic]. Undeci indietro Dodici avanti. Tredecim in Roverso a dritta quattordici e quindici avanti con due dritti come la nona e Decima sopra.

Poscia il Maestro chiamerà presa ossia riposo d'armi sono quattro batute che devonsi fare con gran paura ed queste serve succedendo uno sbaglio per ripiego Prima al proprio compagno in faccia Secondo in roverso a dritta partendo dalla partendo dalla [sic] parte del'arma terza avanti e quarta in roverso Queste battute si continua fino a quando vuole il maestro.

Parte terza. Il Maestro Chiamerà Tagio Turco sono nove batute Prima si batte il sinistro partendo secondo in roverso a Dritta terza avanti Quarta in roverso Quinta e Sesta Avanti con due Dreti. Settima alle Gambe in roverso senza muoversi. Ottava alla testa senza muoversi al sinistro. Poscia con il sudetto sinistro portandosi essendo in gioco o Dentro o Fuori dalla parte del'Arma si dà la Nona Batuta in atto di colpirsi una con l'altro. Metendo come in difesa il braccio sinistro inchinato orizzontalmente alla Fronte. Poscia suindicata Presa.

Parte Quarta Il Maestro Chiamerà Inzenochiada sono sedici battute prima si batte il sinistro partendo Seconda in roverso a dritta terza avanti e quarta girandosi si poggia un ginocchio in terra mezzi dentro e mezzi fuori Quinta alzandosi si deve dare il Célpo al Compagno sinistro. Sesta in roverso a dritta settima avanti Ottava in roverso. Nona avanti. Decima sottogamba Incontrando il piede destro. Si porta l'arma al insoto guardando la punta del piede maniera facile di trovare nel istessa posizione l'arma del compagno Undecima alla testa [?] del sinistro. E duodecima sottogamba come prima e poi indietro tredici al sinistro quattordici in roverso quindici al sinistro e sedici girando il corpo come sopra devonsi ritrovare col ginocchio appoggiato in terra e così pure l'Arma. Indi la solita presa.

Quinta Parte il Maestro chiamerà Posae sono nove Batute 1. Al sinistro 2. in roverso a Dritta dalla parte del arma sempre girando 3. avanti 4. in roverso 5. avanti con due dretti 7. girando tutto il Corpo dalla parte del Arma devono ritrovarsi l'arme inalzate di tutto braccio incrociate 8 si batte a passo fermo l'avversario dalla parte del arma non movendo del Corpo che il solo Braccio del'Arma. 9. Abasando l'arma si dà il roverso a dritta, sempre però a passo fermo dovendo ritrovarsi sempre in Azion mezzi Dentro e mezzi fora. Solita Presa.

Sesta Parte Il Maestro chiamerà sottogamba sono 12 Batute 1 Al sinistro partendo 2 in roverso 3. in avanti 4. in roverso e 5. in avanti 6. Indietro in roverso a dritta

7. avanti 8. in roverso e 9. in avanti 10 sottogamba 11 alla testa darà dirigersi il Colpo e 12 Sottogamba Poi la solita Presa.

Settima Parte Il Maestro Chiamerà Disarm sono essa composta di quattro volte il taglio turco cui opererete come lo stesso di sopra indicatovi tre volte la stocada sono 8 batute 1. al risguardante 2. in roverso a dritta 3. avanti 4. in roverso 5. avanti e 6. con due dretti 7. movendo del Corpo che il solo braccio Dando al indietro con l'arma dando un colpo su quella del avversario il qual colpo si dovrà ben sentire 8. non si fà che un sol passo avanti onde trovare col sudetto altra figura terminando con questa la Comandaisa. Poscia per terminare questo disarmo Abisogna di fare tre volte la presa Italiani sono 9. batutte 1. allo stesso 2. in roverso a dritta 3. avanti 4. in roverso 5. avanti e 6. avanti con due dretti. 7 alla gambe 8. alla testa mostrando di colpire e 9. quelli che batono fuori devono trovarsi dentro come vincitori e quelli di dentro sarano fuori con un ginocchio piegato a terra in atto d'implorare Pietà dal Vincitore il quale gli porrà un piede sul ginocchio atterato e con l'Arma in atto di Colpirlo. Allora il maestro potrà Chiamare Indietro fino alle tre volte cioè farlo replicare e così terminerà il gioco.

Fine

Appendix 3: Figures

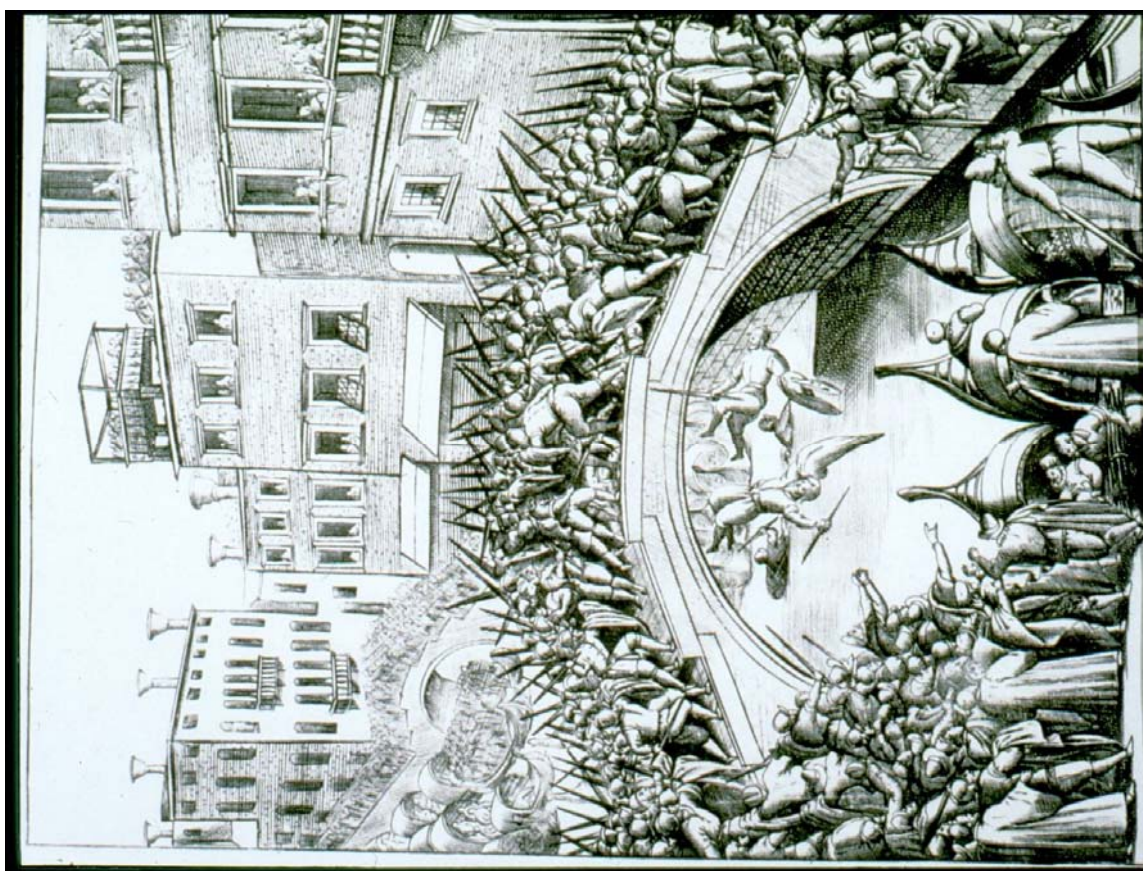


Figure 1: Battle of Sticks. Engraving (1610) by G. Franco

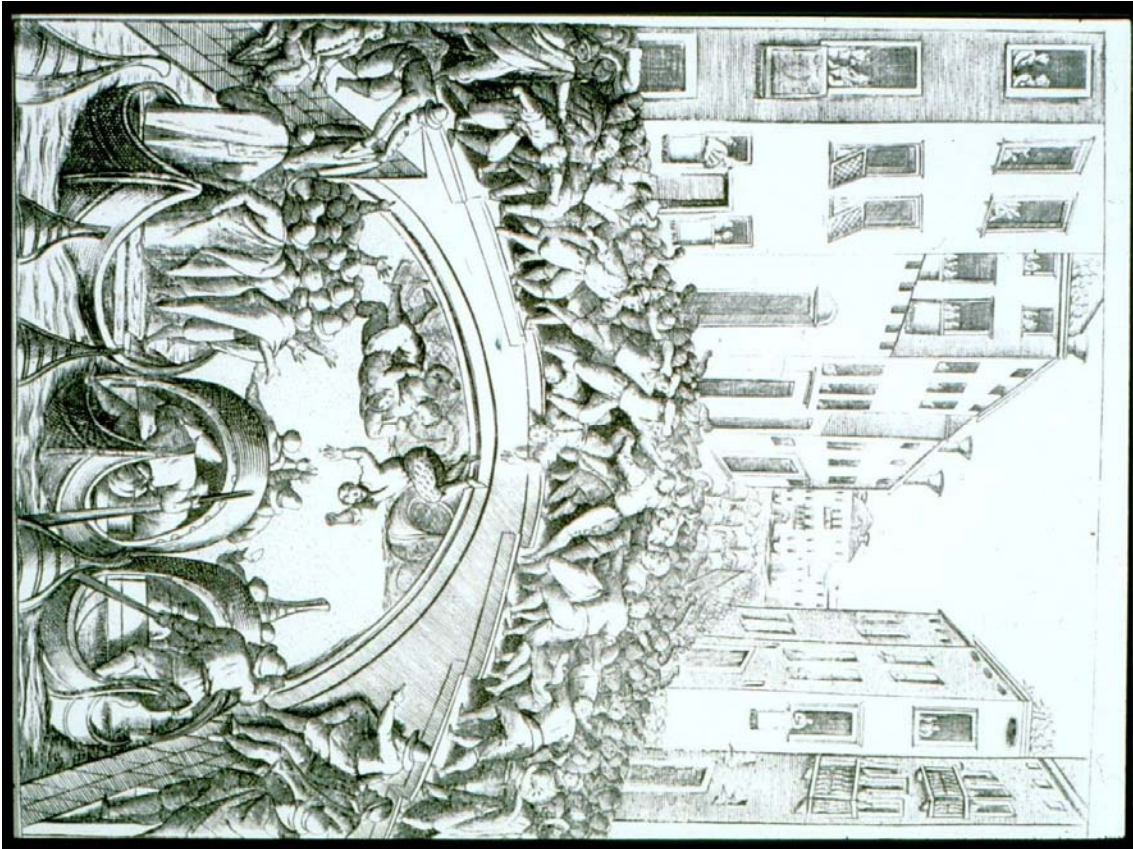


Figure 2: Battle of the Fists. Engraving (1610) by G. Franco

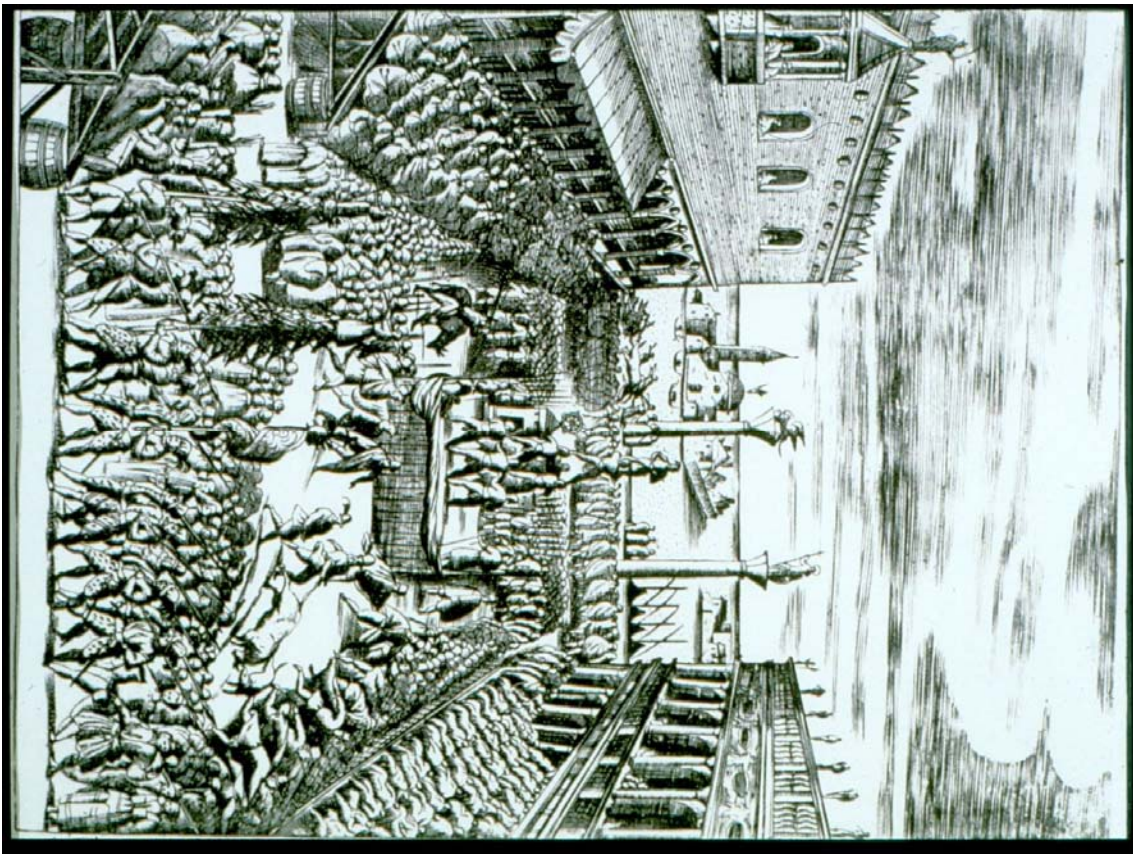
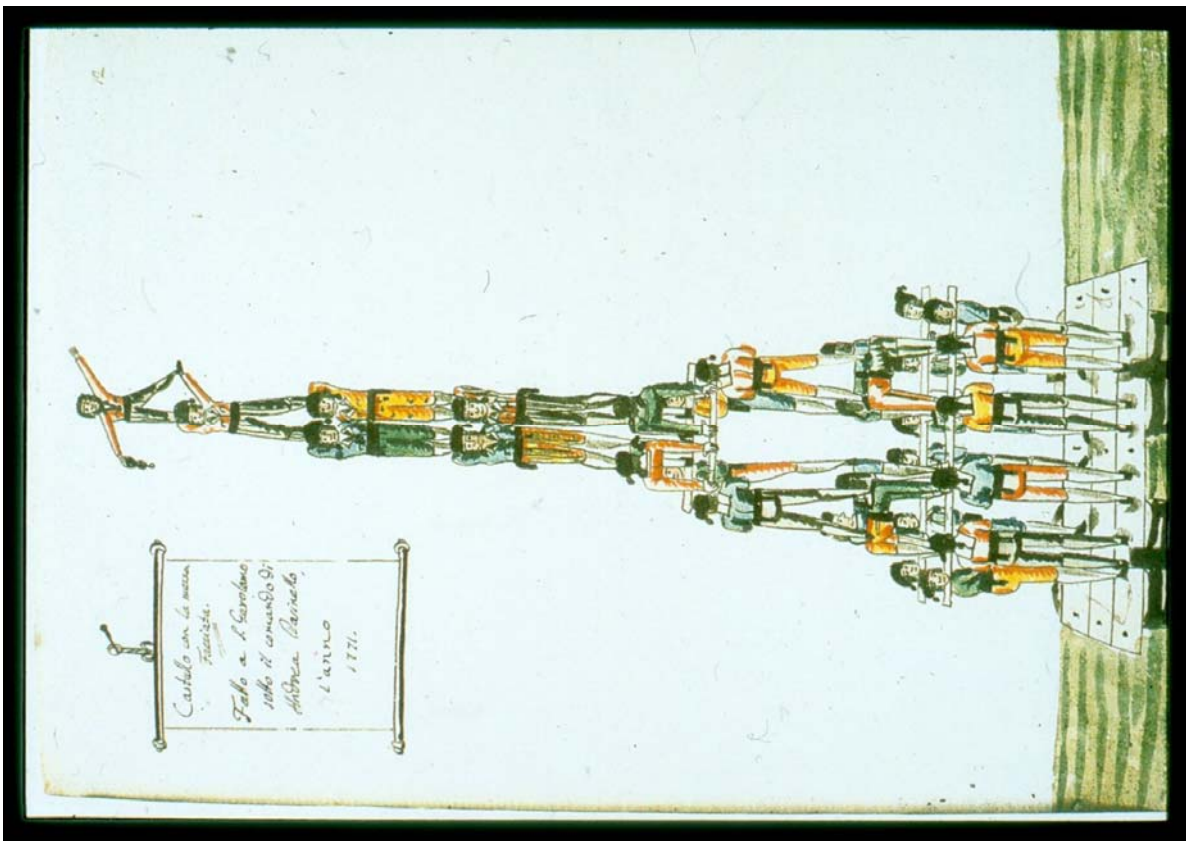
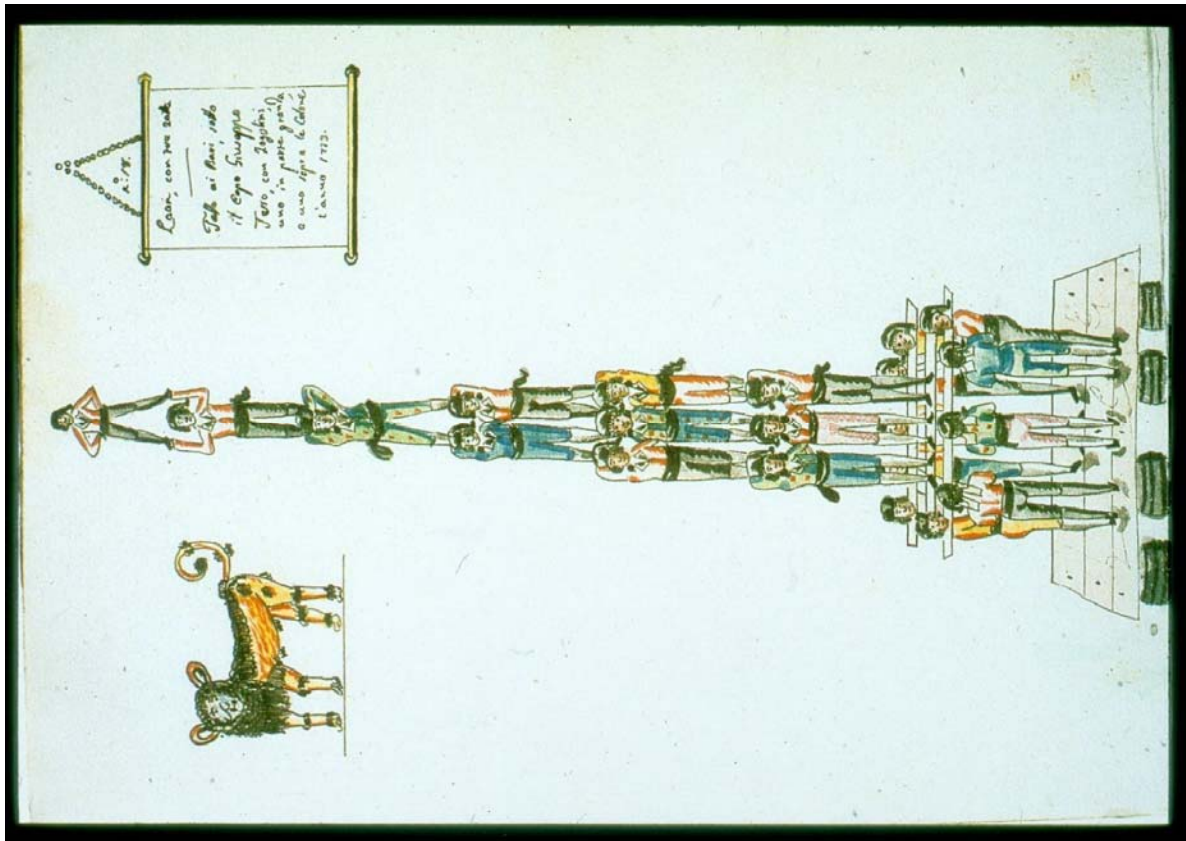


Figure 3: Festa of »Fat Thursday«. Engraving (1610) by G. Franco



Figures 4 and 5: Drawings of the Hercules pyramids.

Figures 6—12: Drawings of the »Game of the Moresca« by P. V.

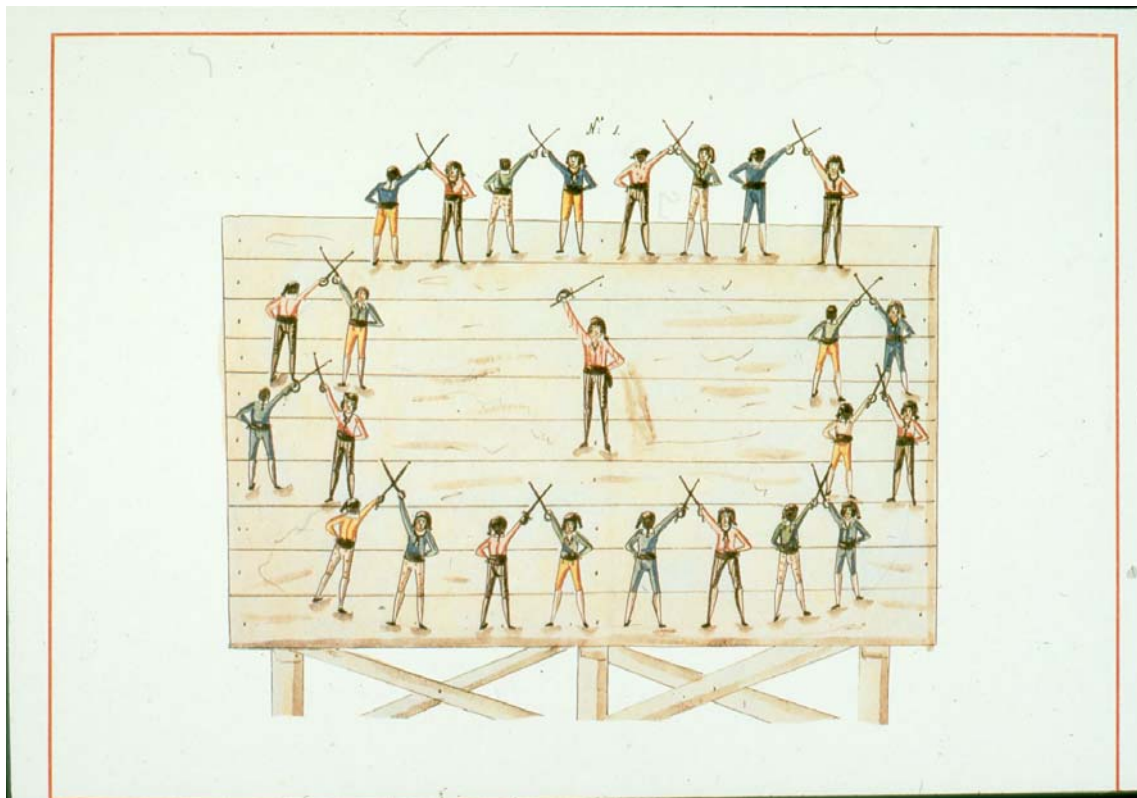


Figure 6: »Azion« (Action)

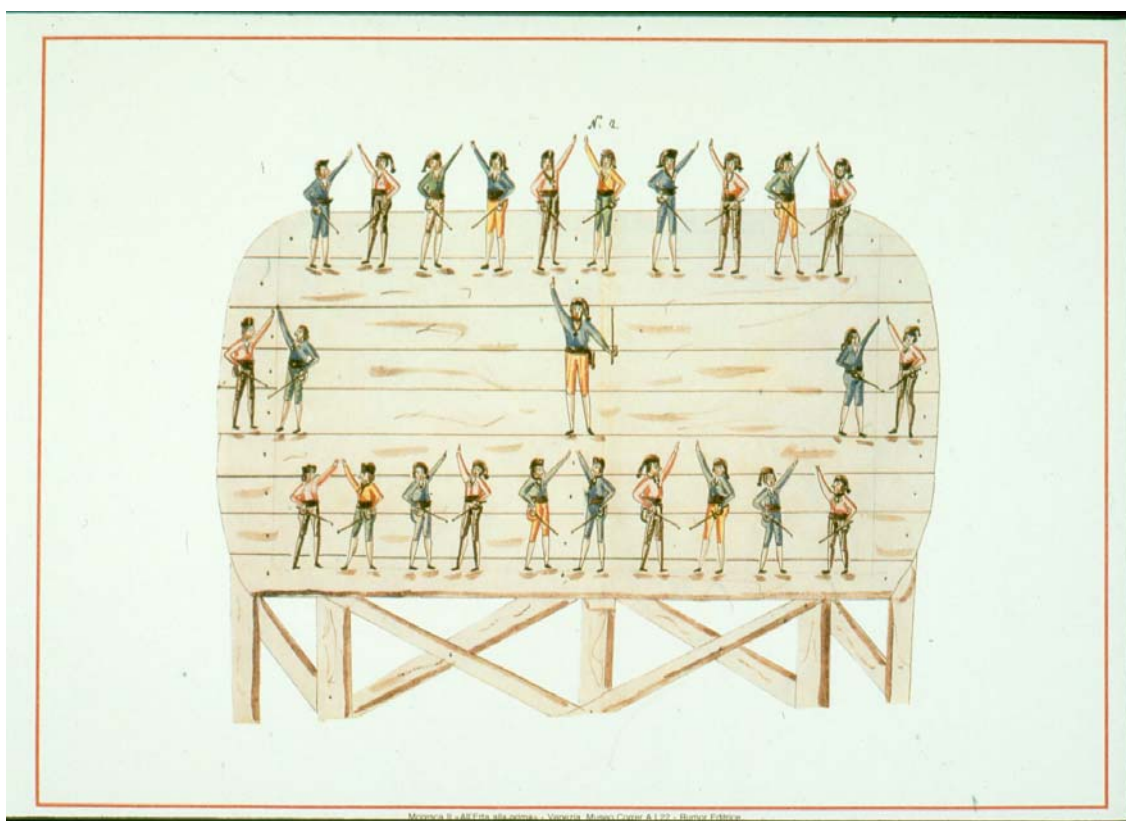


Figure 7: »All'Erta alla prima« (Be ready for the first)

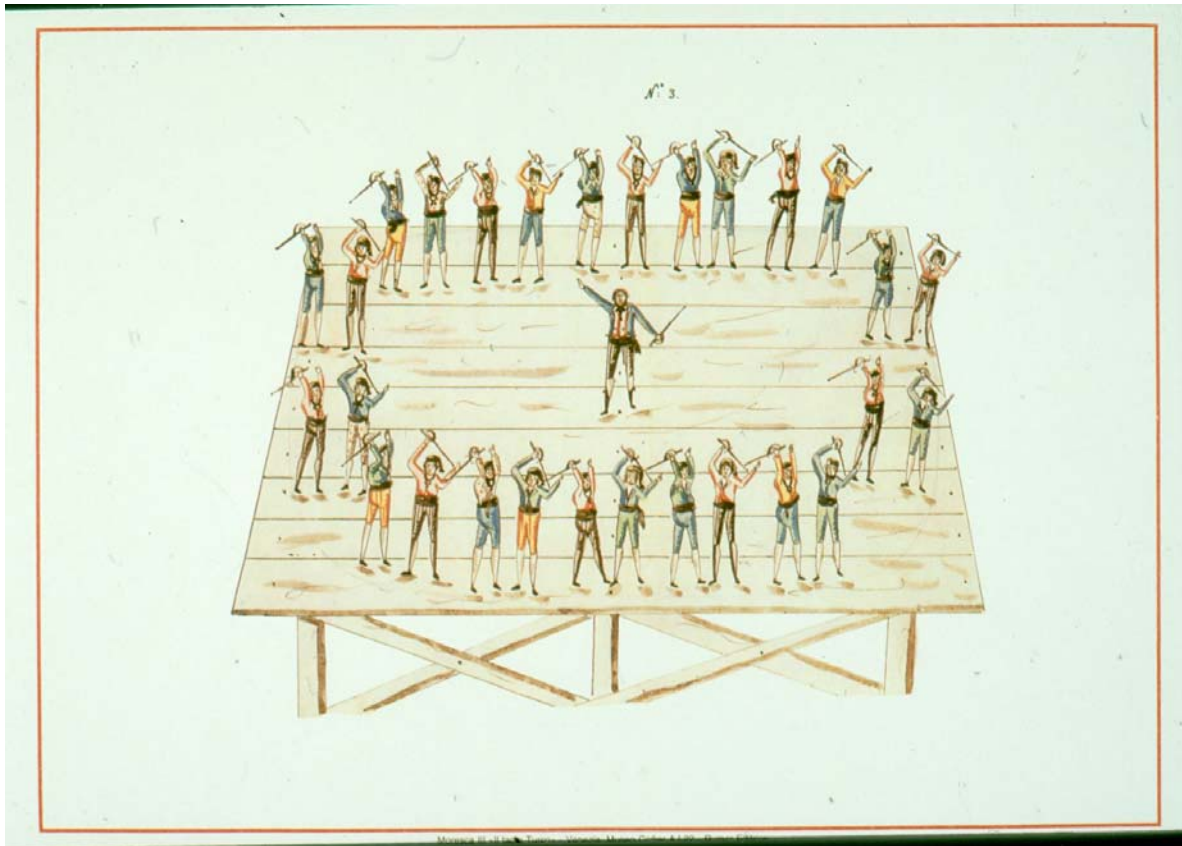


Figure 8: »Il Tagio Turco« (The Turkish cut)

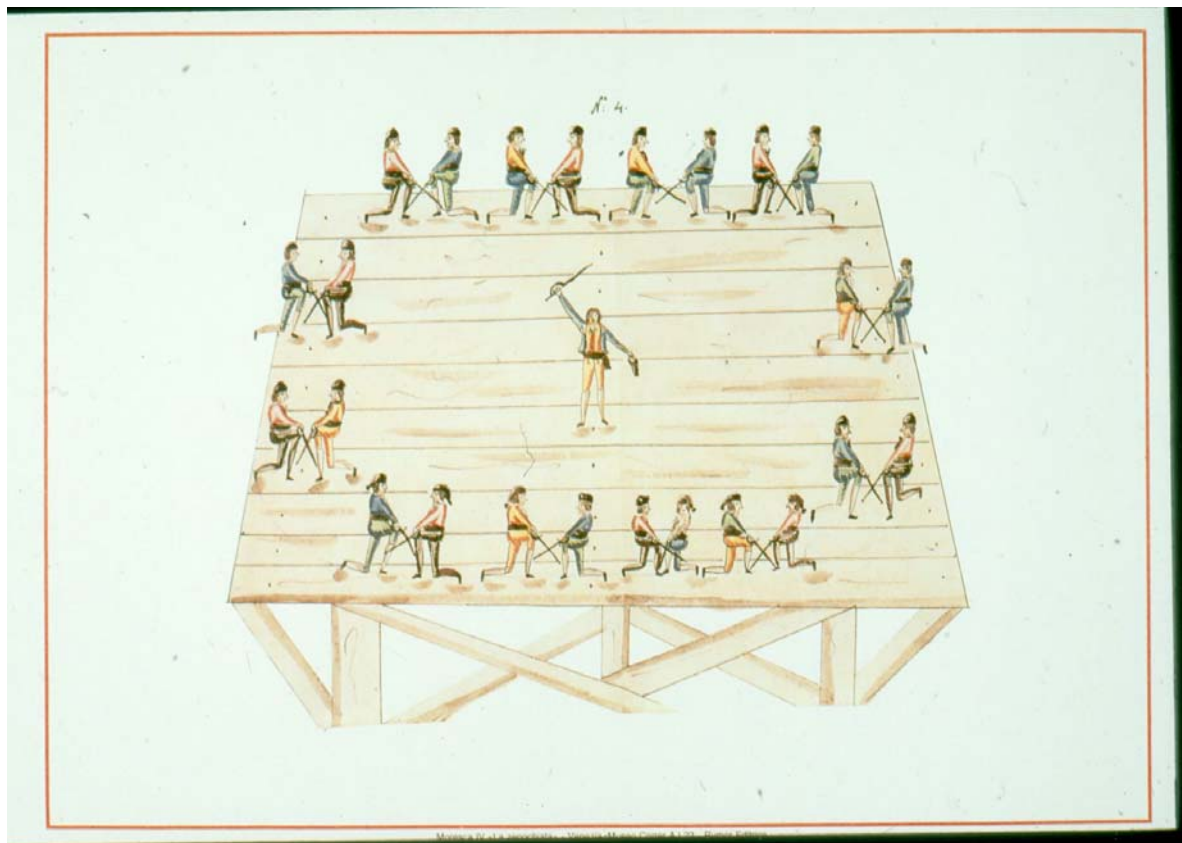


Figure 9: »La Zenochiata« (The kneeling figure)

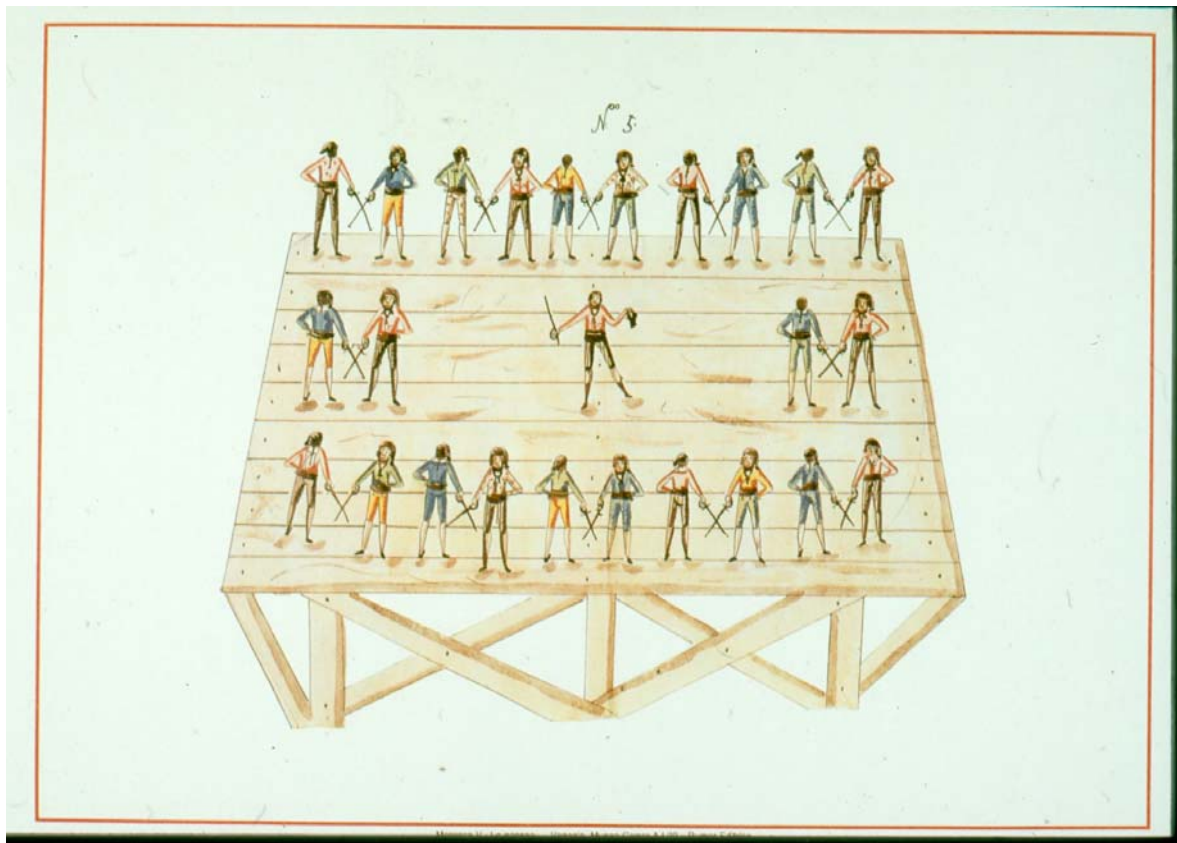


Figure 10: »Le Passae« (Passing figures?)

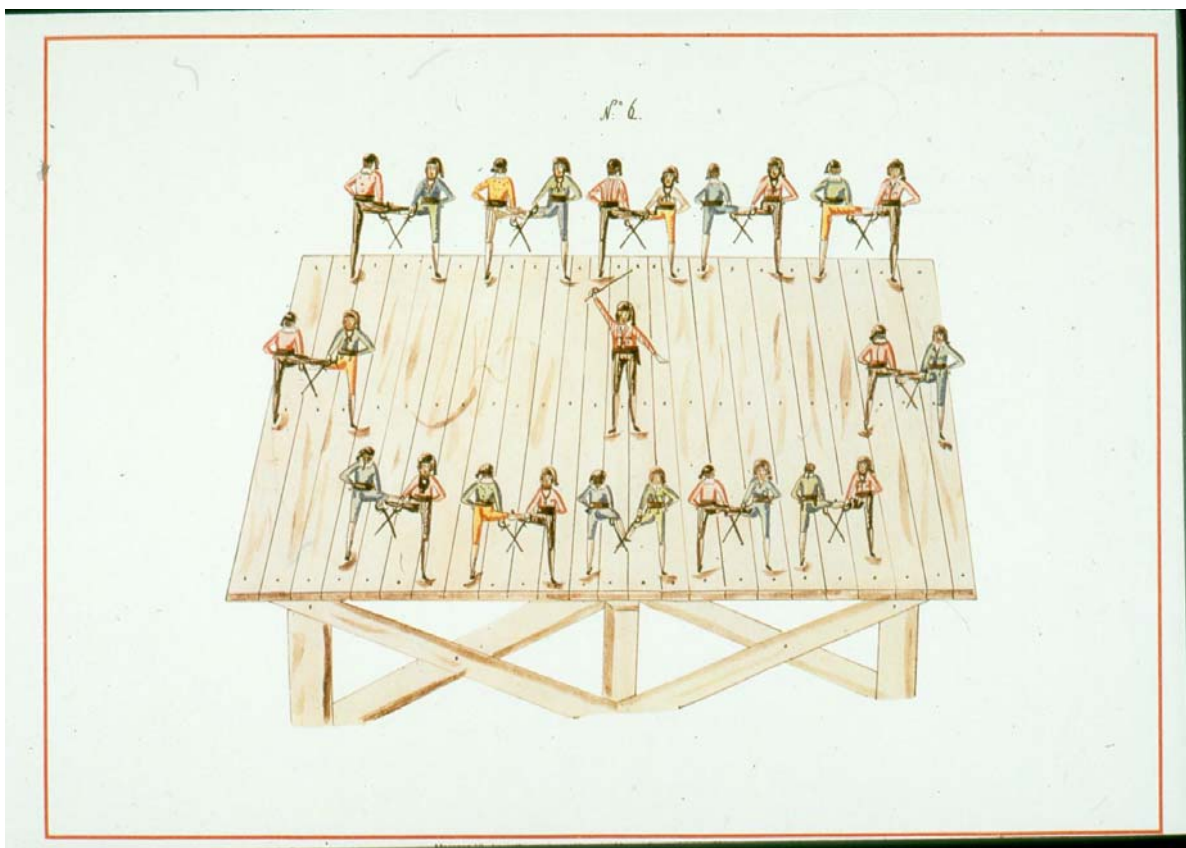


Figure 11: »La sotto Gamba« (Under the leg)

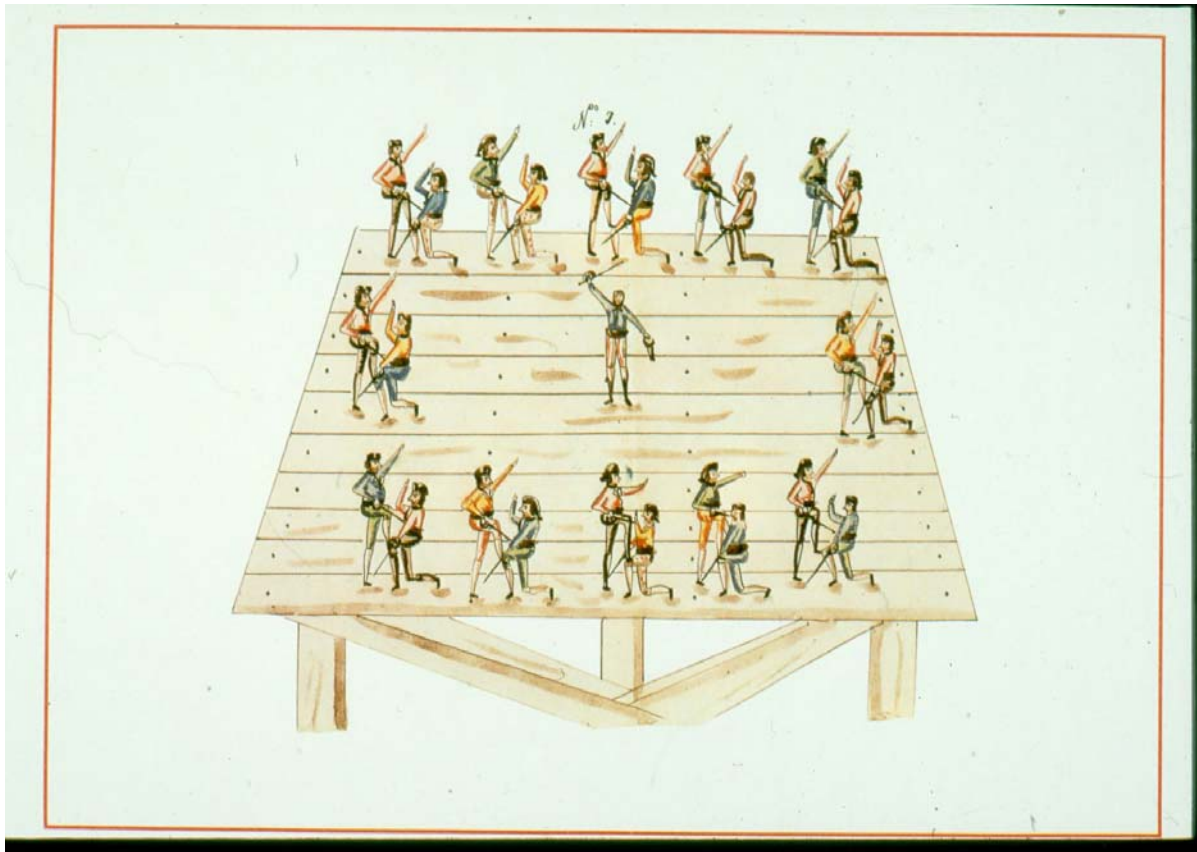


Figure 12: »Il Disarmo« (The surrender)

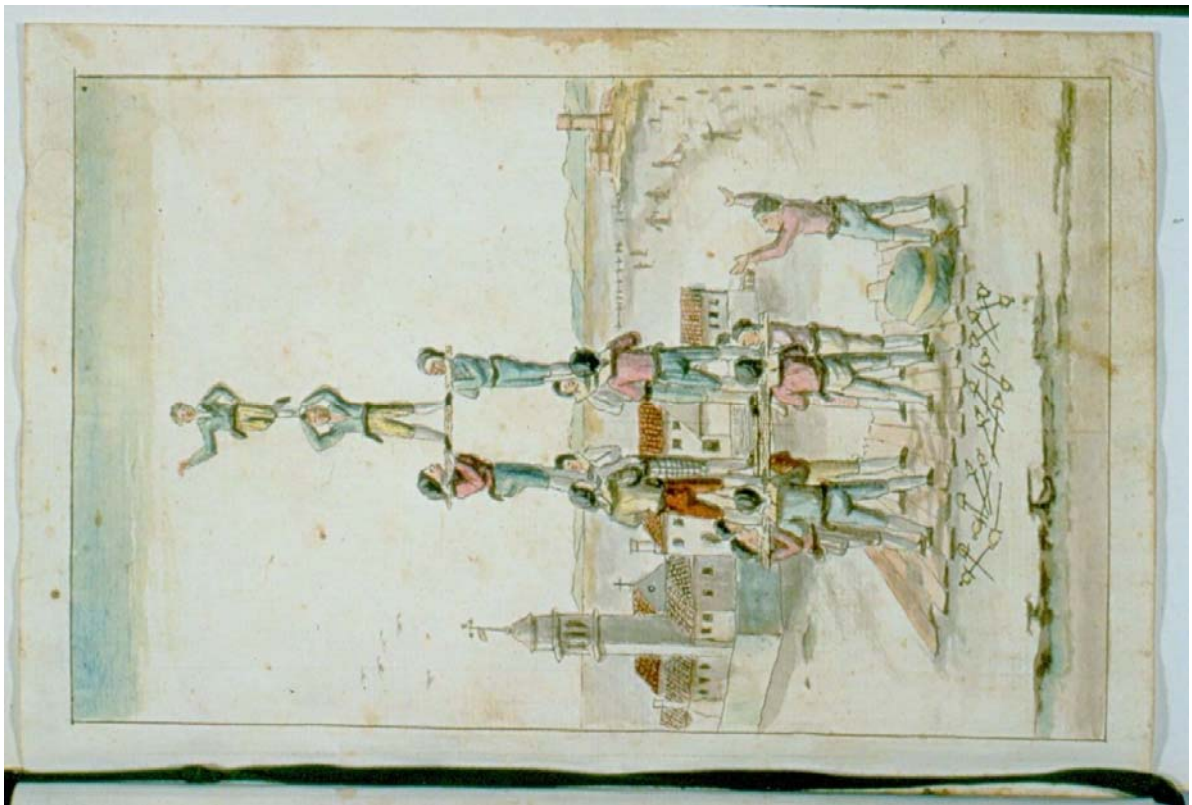


Figure 13

»Game of the *Forze* by the Nicolotti in 1788 on the ice near San Secondo, followed by the moresca«

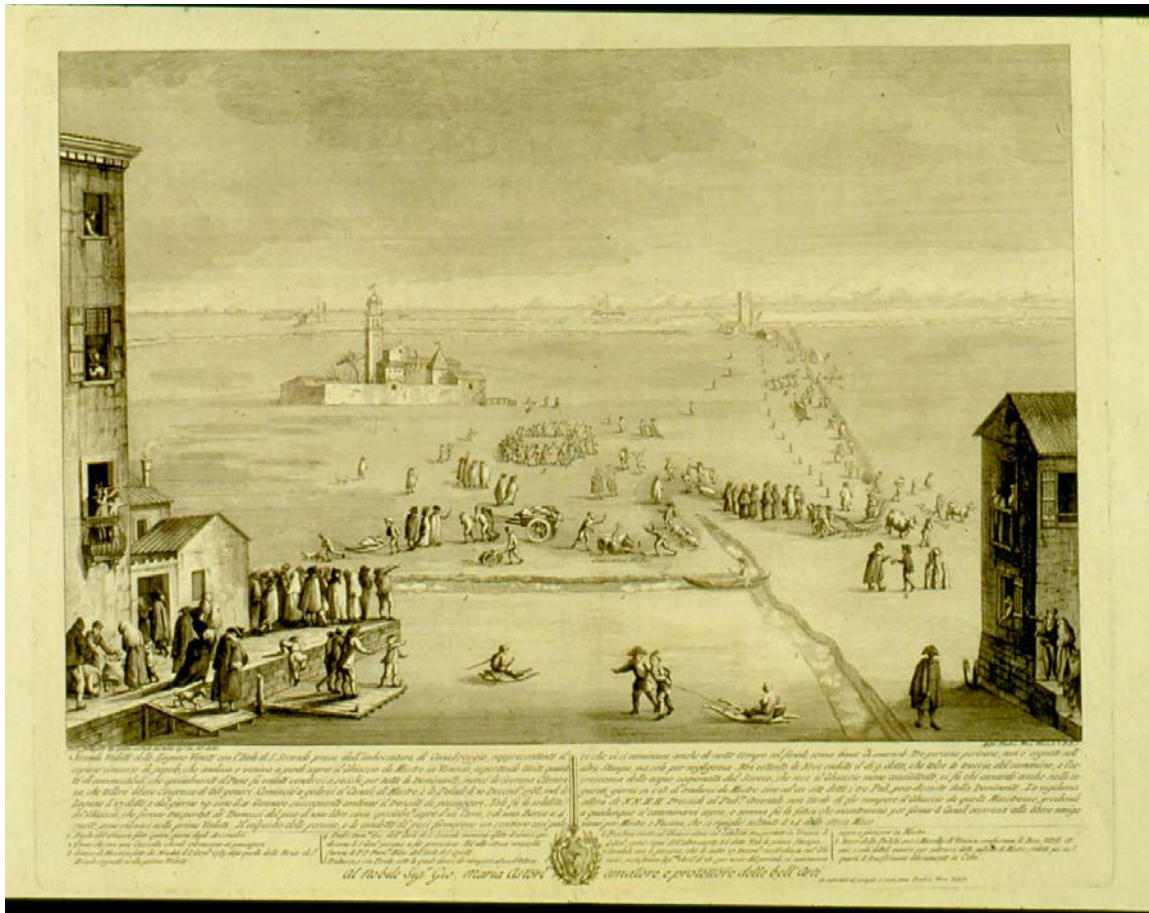


Figure 14: Engraving of events on the frozen lagoon by T. Viero, *Gazzetta*, 17 January 1789

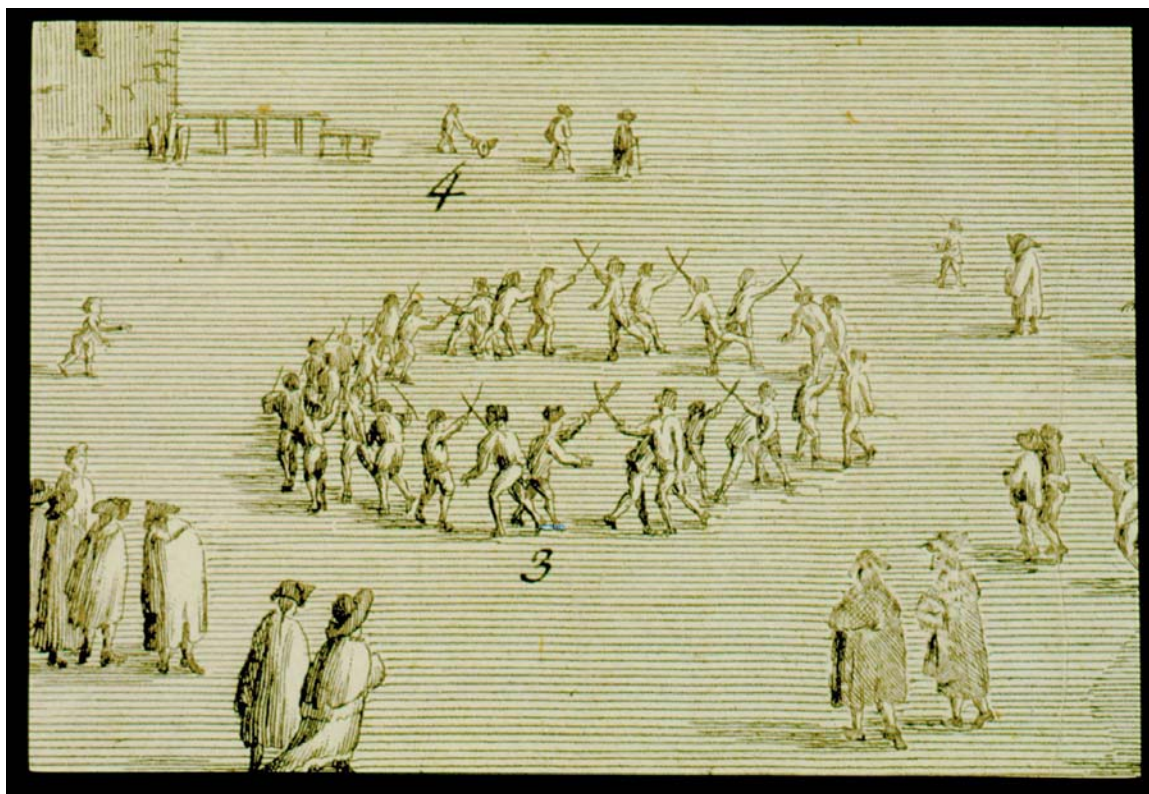


Figure 15: Detail of morisca from engraving