



One-on-One Combat in the Arena

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Le Combat Seul à Seul

Peek inside

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Part One

First Chapter – If combat must be permitted and if it is lawful

Duels have been condemned by all divine and human laws as something which is contrary to the law, principally, the law of the Church and the commands of God, that to call out and kill each other, as he [does] who desires to spill the blood of another, is to be willingly subject to die by the sword. Our Lord does not want the shedding of blood, nor that man demand justice⁸ against the life of his fellow among Christians who must live in common accord and maintain themselves in peace and union and live according to the commandments of God. The Persians, Hebrews, Greeks and Latins very expressly forbade it, if it were not in a legitimate, good and well-founded war and [done] in order to end it, like the duel between David and Goliath in Kings I, chapter 17 and the single combat⁹ between Hector and Ajax reported by Homer in the tenth [book] of the Iliad, and like the duel of the Horatii against the Curiatti told by Titus Livy, like the Fabians who battled Curiatti before the assembled battalions¹⁰ in order to end the dispute between their countries and nations, [like] Romulus fighting Titus, King of the Sabines. Similarly, even a King conducting his army, and being there in person, fights another King against whom he was at war, in order to end by arms, both alone, the quarrel and dispute which they have and avoid a greater waste and loss of their men to come. And if the one-on-one combat was done otherwise, it closely imitates bestial brutes who with ferocity are held and are hit because they have neither the reason nor the judgement to discern the evil and the shame which comes from it. Thus the reason

⁸ *intenter*

⁹ *monomachie*

¹⁰ *les batailles rangees*

why the ancient and very civilised nations condemned and detested all individual combats. However, fighting in the arena has always been a common practice among the French, English, Burgundians, Italians, Germans, and Northerners. It has been received, observed, and undertaken with many good considerations and great, evident reasons. Seeing the country filled with brave gentlemen and good soldiers, who are well drilled and instructed in arms and continually exercised in making war, this exercise and practice of arms is considered honest. By imitating this practice, they will better make and acquire the most honourable reputation, the title of an honourable and valiant man. Therefore, they are taught to know and debate virtue and honour. In this way, the Gentleman and brave soldier, well tested, jealous of his honour and of his merit and valour, will allow nothing to be said by his companion which he thought could offend his honour and reputation. It is the circumstance of the quarrels which arise between them that leads them to call each other to combat when they understand that their honour is offended. On this, many murders have been committed. Thus why the King must be careful, in order to prevent this insolence, to have an eye that his subjects cannot be called out without his permission. Otherwise, there would be confusion and almost brigandage in his Kingdom if such a way of being called out to fight was not suppressed by the Prince. This makes me of the opinion that it may be better to grant the duel to his subjects who are of the condition and the profession of honour than to endure such miseries and misfortunes which happen in his Kingdom. In denying the duel, a King of the Lombards named Rotaris wanted to remove it from his subjects. But he was forced to undertake it again even though he protested that it was against all humanity. Philippe le Bel¹¹ forbade them in his Kingdom. But his subjects immediately begged him to bring them back in order to avoid the murders which took place every day. King Francis I, being a virtuous and very Christian Prince, permitted them several times in his Kingdom and, in his time, the Prince of Melphe, his Lieutenant in Piedmont, in order to suppress the insolent, who were usually there and cut the way to quarrels that occurred there, ordered a place where soldiers fought with the express restriction of only undertaking [this] with his permission. Then King Henry II permitted the duel at the beginning of his reign and later he forbade it by an edict [continued by] King Charles IX, his son. This prohibition has been the cause of many murders which were done since, which are made and will be made if there is not otherwise put

¹¹Philip IV of France (1268–1314)

in place management and such order that one can have reparations for injury to his honour — which seems to me can be done if the King alone permits one-on-one combat in his Kingdom in the arena with very rigorous prohibitions on not being called out otherwise, and that whoever will be called out without his commandment will be exemplary punished by his justice.

Chapter II – In what circumstances the King must allow combat in the arena to his subject

When I say that the King must allow combat in the arena to his subjects, I do not mean that it be allowed to all who would ask for it but, when asked for combat, the King must examine the cause of the quarrel and try by all good ways to reconcile¹² them and to call the marshals and principal Councillors in order to give them an accord to be kept without favour or affection, particularly [to award] the right to whom it belongs and to condemn the one who is wrong. And, if the Prince knows that it will be too difficult for the wrongdoer to embrace the right of equity, not wanting to submit to the judgement of his good council for whatever good reasons and remonstrates, then one could say, “the King must use his absolute authority and force him to temper this with the reason, that is to say, to hold the strong hand in order that right and reason be maintained.” But I say that coming to this, he must seek all means of bringing them to accord. And if the quarrel is of such consequence and so difficult that he who demands the duel is so insulted and offended, and that he goes there with his honour only able to be satisfied by arms, immediately beseeching the King to permit him the duel, it may be difficult for the latter,¹³ wanting to support the honour of his subject and also [when] by refusing,¹⁴ dishonouring him, because in truth the King has a lot of power over his subject although he goes with his honour, it is necessary that the subject debates it with his sword. For this consideration, it seems to me that [the King] must permit combat in the arena in order that his honour is restored.

¹² *appointer*

¹³ *luy dernier*

¹⁴ *veu qu'il y va de l'honneur de son subiect et aussi en luy refusant*

Chapter III – The causes for which one must allow combat

It is therefore required that the King look to the causes which are permitted to allow combat: the accusation of a crime of *leze majesté*¹⁵ is legitimate for allowing the duel; also being accused of having committed a murder by ambush; of having wanted to commit treason, either on the person of the King or of having wanted to take money in return for a position, or having taken and stolen the King's money, [or] when one has defamed and dishonoured a lady. In all these cases, if one is accused, the King can permit the duel in order to defend the contrary. However, it would only be reasonable for the King, on a simple accusation, to order the duel with moderation. But he must proceed there, if on reflection and with such truth that the accuser is obliged to support his words with arms, in the case that he can find no witnesses who can testify with full proof to his accusation. For if the accusation laid against him deserves death, the duel must be granted.

Chapter IIII – The quality of persons, when, and to whom the duel must be granted

The granting of the duel is a form of justice that the King must observe for the preservation of the honour of his subjects, as he is the true and sole judge of his subject's honour. For, in truth, before the King orders a duel, many things must be considered; namely, if the combatants are of the same grade, if the duel that one demands is just, and if it must be granted and suffered that they come to arms. This was the reason that Philip, Duke of Burgundy, issue of the House of France,¹⁶ forbade and abolished all duels in Holland in case a yeoman,¹⁷ at any time and for little reason, called a Gentleman to duel. Also, it is not reasonable that a yeoman or someone from a very low place and without experience call out another who is a man of honour, of merit and of valour, and who has proved his person through many long years, being dignified with great merit. Such people have respect, and the King must have regard to their status. And if it happens that one who has less and lower status than he who is called to combat and, if he has no rank or experience because of his tender youth which rubs and

¹⁵ A crime against the dignity of the Crown. In other words, treason.

¹⁶ Possibly Philip III, the Good, b.1396, d.1467. Duke of Burgundy from 1419

¹⁷ *le roturier*

provokes immediately¹⁸ and takes quickly a quarrel in a good or bad cause, being confident in his skill and his valour or disdaining him with whom he has a quarrel and laughing at him, this must be corrected by the Prince. And when such a dispute is created between two Gentlemen, who are not equal in status or experience, the house and nation of he who has the greatest blame is obliged to satisfy it without entering into a duel and make him content. But, someone could object to me that this would be the way to give the reins to rich Gentlemen, of shouting down¹⁹ one who has not similar status and quality. The response is that if the rich Gentleman or someone who has more honour than another has so forgotten injuring one lesser than him, or that with gaiety of heart he [the rich Gentleman] imposed on him some injurious and defamatory words that he [the injured party] has never forgotten he said, in this case, he [the rich Gentleman] is required to defend himself and deny the words which he put to him [the injured party], together fending off the injury which he [the rich Gentleman] did, offer to prove the contrary to him, and avenge himself by arms in the arena with permission of the King, providing that the accusation was worthy of death. But otherwise he who is not of similar status is held to respect and honour one who is of more than him. One must not accept the excuses of a heap of scroungers and mockers²⁰ who are used to jeering and after they have offended an honest man and honourable Gentleman, they think are acquitted of it by saying that they did it either in jest or without having thought about it. Thus the good excuses they give in such quarrels. When one reconciles them, they should examine their language before speaking, for once a word is said it can no longer be revoked. It's necessary keep it between Gentlemen for he who denies that which is said does a very great wrong to his reputation. However, I will say that if the word which he said is not true, he will have more honour in disclaiming it than in maintaining it. One will never have honour in maintaining a wrong cause. Also, be fully assured that God will never favour him.

Chapter V – Of those who are exempt from duels

It is very reasonable to observe the nation, status and house of those who claim to ask for the duel. For if it was allowed to all persons

¹⁸ *qui le grade et chatouille*

¹⁹ *de braver*

²⁰ *un tas de gaudisseurs et brocardeurs*