This study guide looks at the basic techniques used in the Bolognese sidesword tradition. It is based primarily on the works of Antonio Manciolino. His first book focuses on the Spada da Gioco or practice sword paired with a Brochiero Piccolo, a small buckler of roughly 8 to 10” in diameter.

Where Manciolino is incomplete or unclear, we have added lessons from Achille Marozzo.

Copyright
For Antonio Manciolino our primary source is Jherek Swanger’s translation of Opera Nova, books 1 thru 3, available on Wiktenauer. For a complete translation of Opera Nova, look for “The Complete Renaissance Swordsman” by Tom Leoni, published by Freelance Academy Press.

For Achille Marozzo we are using William E. Wilson’s translation of Arte dell’ Armi. Note that this book is also referred to as Opera Nova, but we will be using the first title for clarity.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction and General Terminology

This chapter looks at basic concepts such as the parts of the sword and how to perform basic attacks. It includes a mixture of physical and written exercises, as well as quotes from the historic manuals.

Parts of the Spada/Sword

- Filo Dritto – Straight Edge or True Edge
- Filo Falso – False Edge
- Forte – Strong
- Debole – Weak
- Punta – Point
- Quillon – Cross Guard
- Pommel – Little Apple. Counter-weight.
- Knucklebow
- Finger Rings

Types of Swords

- Spada a Uno Mano – One-handed Sword
- Spada a Due Mani – Two-handed Sword
- Spada da Filo – Edged Sword
- Spada da Gioco – Game Sword

Secondaries

- Brochiero – Buckler: May be piccolo/small (8 to 10”) or larga/large (12 to 14”)
- Targa – Target: Square, wavy
- Rotella – Wheel: Resembles the shield used by Captain America and is strapped to arm

Armor

This tradition was designed to be used both with and without armor.

Selecting a Sword

When selecting a practice sword, synthetic or steel, look for one that such that the quillons are no higher than the navel when the point is placed on the ground. The blade can be shorter, but if it is longer than it will be difficult to use many of the techniques that are common to the Bolognese tradition.

For the hilt, a simple cross-guard is not unusual for the time. However, finger rings and a knuckle-bow, as depicted in the photo below by Darkwood Armory, is also appropriate for the period. Avoid the sweeps and side rings found in more complex hilts, as they tend to interfere with the use of the buckler.
Antonio Manziolino

To whomsoever as well in playing, the short weapon, or the short sword, is of greater virtue. Because it forces the players to approach, from whence they are made ideal at warding and of good eye.

**Carrying**
The sidesword is of a moderate length and could be worn at the waist by a scabbard or sheath.

**Gripping the Sword**
As you can see in the illustration above, it is customary to wrap the index finger over the true edge quillon. While reasonably safe when you have a finger ring, this is quite dangerous when using a simple cross guard. Therefore it is advisable to slide the hand back so that the index finger is behind the quillon, but you are otherwise holding it the same way.

**The Salute**
As a sign of respect, it is customary to salute at the beginning class and before any pair exercise or sparring. We shall be using a common intro to the Bolognese assaults as our salute.

1. Assume an upright and noble stance with your feet together. Your buckler should be on your left thigh, the sword by your right side with the point angled towards the ground and slightly to the right.
2. Take a small step forward with the right foot, at the same time strike the dome of your buckler with the false edge of your sword.
3. Raise your sword into Guardia Alta, as depicted in the illustration.
Porta di Ferro Stretta (Narrow Iron Gate)
The first guard or posture we’ll be working with is Porta di Ferro Stretta or the Narrow Iron Gate. Since we’ll be doing the footwork exercises without a buckler, we’ll begin with dall’Agocchie’s description.

Giovanni dall’Agocchie

*Every time that you have your right foot forward one pace, which will be neither large nor small, but proportionate, with the sword hand on the inside near the right knee, and the point thereof aimed at the enemy, This will be named porta di ferro stretta; and it was named “stretta” for being a very secure guard.*

This illustration of Agrippa’s Terza is equivalent to Porta di Ferro Stretta. Note that the hand is over or just inside the right knee. If you instead move it right so that it is outside of the knee, then you have assumed a guard known as Coda Lunga Stretta, which we’ll discuss later.

Basic Footwork Part 1

Giovanni dall’Agocchie

*One steps with reason and art, and goes in all the guards to find the adversary. This can be done by beginning with either foot, on the diagonal or having one foot drive the other forward, according to the time and the need. Nonetheless, stepping with a pace neither large nor small is of greater utility, because thereby you can both advance forward and retire back without bodily discomfort, always accompanying the hand with the foot. But you must be advised that the forward leg must be a bit bent at the knee, and its foot must point straight toward the enemy; and the rear leg will be a bit curved and with its foot somewhat on the diagonal, in such a manner that every movement will be full of grace.*

There are many different ways to step. Some of present in all styles of fencing, while others are mentioned only be a single school or even a specific master. Presenting them all at this time would be a disservice to the reader, so this section focuses only on the common steps. The remainder will appear in later study guides.

In some of the diagrams you will see narrow lines without arrow heads. These are “stance lines”, the length of which is used to illustrate how narrow or wide ones stance is.
Increase
An increase is simply the act of moving the front foot forward. This can be used to change one's stance or for a quick attack.

Here we see an increase used as part of a lunge.

Advancing Step
The advancing step begins with moving the front foot forward. The length of the advance should be roughly one to one-and-a-half foot-lengths. A larger step than that risks unbalancing the fencer.

Gathering Forward
A forward gathering step is simply drawing the rear foot up to the front foot. This prepares you for making a larger step.

Gather Back
You can also gather your front foot back to meet your rear foot. This is useful when you want to put a little space between you and your opponent without actually changing your position.

Retreating Steps
The retreating step can be performed in two ways.

The first option is to move the lead foot close to the rear foot. Then slide the rear foot back. This is useful for quickly moving the body out of harm's way.

The second option is to push the rear foot back first. This is done by straightening the front knee. Its
advantage is that your feet are never close together, which is less stable position.

![Diagram of foot positions]

**Exercise 1 – Stepping**

For this exercise, the sword is optional.

Assume the posture of Porta di Ferro Stretta with the right foot forward. Perform an increase by pushing out the front foot one to two foot lengths, then completed the advancing step by pulling the rear foot up until your return to Porta di Ferro Stretta. Repeat several times, then switch lead foot. (If using swords, you may optionally switch hands as well.)

From Porta di Ferro Stretta, pull back your lead foot into a narrow stance. Immediately after completing this gathering step, increase the front foot back into our medium Porta di Ferro Stretta. This action will be used to avoid the opponent’s attack and then immediately counter-attack. Repeat several times with either foot forward.

From Porta di Ferro Stretta, gather your rear foot forward. As soon as they meet, increase your front foot by three or four foot-lengths. Then immediately draw your rear forward back into our medium Porta di Ferro Stretta. This is done to allow for longer attacks than if your rear foot remained fixed. Again, repeat several times with either foot forward.

**Manciolino’s Classification for the Primary Cuts**

In addition to the Italian names for the cuts, we will be using the Victorian numbering scheme, which you can see illustrated on the right.

As a general rule, step with the right foot for cuts from the right (Lines 1, 3, and 5) and the left foot for cuts from the left (Lines 2, 4, and 6). For vertical cuts step with either foot.

**Mandritto or Dritto**

The first cut is the straight cut or true cut. This is any cut originating from the right side, but the default is a diagonal cut starting at your opponent’s left ear towards his right knee. (Lines 1, 3, & 5)

**Riverso**

The second cut is the reverse cut. This is the mirror of the Mandritto and describes any cut from the left. (Lines 2, 4, & 6)

**Antonio Manciolino**

_The most genteel of blows is the mandritto, because that one is the most genteel and noble which is done with more difficulty and danger; but to strike with the mandritto is done with more danger than the riverso, since it makes a man go entirely uncovered in that tempo; therefore the mandritto is more genteel._

~ 7 ~
Fendente
The third cut is the vertical cut, Fendente. Its name means “the divider” or “the one which cuts through”. (Line 1)

Some masters distinguish between a Dritto Fendente and a Riverso Fendente, especially when aiming for the shoulders/arms instead of the head.

Modifiers
To be more precise, some Bolognese authors use these modifiers.

Mezzo (Half)
A half-cut, which is to say a cut that ends with the point forward and the arm extended, usually at roughly shoulder height.

Antonio Manziolino
If one finds himself close to the enemy, he must never throw a full blow, because the sword must not distance itself from the presence for the safety of him who holds it, and this throwing of an imperfect blow is called “mezzo tempo”.

Squalimbro or Squalebrarote (Diagonal)
A descending, diagonal cut. A Dritto Squalimbro is along the line 1, while a Riverso Squalimbro follows the line 2.

Tondo (Round)
A horizontal cut. A Dritto Tondo is along the line 5, while a Riverso Tondo follows the line 6.

Ridoppio (Redouble)
A rising, diagonal cut. A Dritto Ridoppio is along the line 3, while a Riverso Ridoppio follows line 4.

Falso (False)
A Falso is any cut performed with the false edge of the sword. Usually this refers to a rising cut (Lines 3 & 4)

Falso Dritto (False Straight)
A rising, diagonal cut with the false edge along the line of 3.

Falso Manco (False Handed)
A rising, diagonal cut with the false edge along the line of 4.

The Primary Thrusts

Stoccata (Straight Thrust)
The Stoccata is a straight or rising thrust. Your palm may down or to the left.

Imbrocatta (Indirect Thrust)
An Imbrocatta is a downward thrust where the hand starts upside down with the palm to the right.

Some authors say that you should rotate the hand downwards after the point lands, so that you end in the same position as if you used a Stoccata.

Punta Riversa (Reverse Point)
A Punta Riversa is a thrust that comes from your left side. It is more or less horizontal and your palm will be up.

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**Sign Man**
It is traditional for fencing schools to have a sign man posted on the wall. This is used to act as a visual reminder of the cuts and what lines they occur on. Using the space below, label the cuts and openings.

![Sign Man Illustration]

**Exercise 2 Targets and their Effect on Range**
Unless told otherwise, most attacks will be aimed at the height of your shoulder. To see why, you’ll need a partner or pell.

Begin by throwing a strike at shoulder height, adjusting your range so that your tip just barely grazes your target. Without moving your feet, aim for locations higher and lower on the body, observing how the change in target affects your range.

**Exercise 3 Stepping with Cuts Part I**
Start in a relaxed stance with the right foot back and the sword near the right shoulder. From this stance, throw cut 1 while stepping forward with the right foot. Recover back to the starting stance. Repeat with cuts 2 thru 7.

Switch to a right-foot forward stance. Again, throw cuts 1 thru 7, this time stepping with the left foot.

In the space below, record whether you prefer stepping with the right or left foot with each of the seven cuts.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

~ 9 ~
**Exercise 4 Grip**
As the blow lands, the grip on the sword should be loose. Think of it like a hammer; if you hold the hammer firmly you shorten your blow and weaken its power. If instead you hold it loosely and allow it to snap, then you can utilize the full power and reach your body provided.

To test reach, experiment near a wall or other stationary object. For power, use a pell. In the space below, record whether you prefer stepping before, during, or after the blow lands.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grip</th>
<th>Effect on Range</th>
<th>Effect on Power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tight</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loose</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Exercise 5 Stepping with Cuts Part II**
Having established which foot to step with for each attack, now it is time to look at when the foot lands. For this exercise, using a pell is preferable. Throw a number 1 cut with a step, ending with the arm fully extended (a mezzo cut). In this experiment, you’ll try completing the cut before, at the same time, and after your foot lands.

In the space below, record whether you prefer stepping before, during, or after the blow lands.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foot Lands Before Sword</th>
<th>Same Time</th>
<th>Foot Lands After Sword</th>
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**Exercise 6 Cuts from Porta di Ferro Stretta**
This exercise can be done solo in or in a line. It begins with basic cuts and works up to the four-cut combinations known informally as Meyer’s Cross.

**High Combo**
Step into Porta di Ferro Stretta with the right foot forward. Increase the right foot while throwing a Mandritto Squalimbro (cut 1). Gather the left foot to the right, the increase the right foot while throwing a Riverso Squalimbro (cut 2) back into a medium Porta di Ferro Stretta.

From Porta di Ferro Stretta, gather back the front foot. Throw a Riverso Squalimbro (cut 2) while stepping back with the same foot. Repeat this gather and back step with Mandritto Squalimbro (cut 1).

**Low Combo**
Step into Porta di Ferro Stretta with the right foot forward. Increase the right foot while throwing a Mandritto Ridoppio (cut 3). Gather the left foot to the right, the increase the right foot while throwing a Riverso Ridoppio (cut 4) back into a medium Porta di Ferro Stretta.

From Porta di Ferro Stretta, gather back the front foot. Throw a Riverso Ridoppio (cut 4) while stepping back with the same foot. Repeat this gather and back step with Mandritto Ridoppio (cut 3).
Cross Combos from the Right
From Porta di Ferro Stretta, use an advancing step with a Mandritto Squalimbro (cut 1). Follow this with a retreating step and a Riverso Ridoppio (cut 4).

From Porta di Ferro Stretta, use an advancing step with a Mandritto Ridoppio (cut 3). Follow this with a retreating step and a Riverso Squalimbro (cut 2).

Cross Combos from the Left
From Porta di Ferro Stretta, use an advancing step with a Riverso Squalimbro (cut 2). Follow this with a retreating step and a Mandritto Ridoppio (cut 3).

From Porta di Ferro Stretta, use an advancing step with a Riverso Ridoppio (cut 4). Follow this with a retreating step and a Mandritto Squalimbro (cut 1).

Antonio Manciolino
In every respect it is an optimal thing to train both hands in every play with every weapon, and to know as well with one as with the other how to strike and to ward.

Repeat this exercise with the sword in the left hand so that you can use either effectively. This will be especially important if you go on to study the use of two swords at once.

Exercise 7 Meyer’s Cross
In order to become more familiar with the sword, the German author Meyer offers us four cutting patterns with four cuts each. Though we are studying Bolognese fencing, it is still useful to us. In the diagram below you can see the four patterns with each step in a given pattern highlighted in red.

These patterns are essentially just two cross combos from the same side. Since there are two sides and you can begin the pattern high or low, there are four basic patterns to practice.

If you prefer to use the Victorian numbering conventions, the patterns are:

1-4-3-2  3-2-1-4  2-3-4-1  4-1-2-3

Exercise 7 The Sword Dance Part I
Place a marker on the ground (e.g. a buckler or mask) between you and your partner. Stand such that your swords cross approximately one third of the distance from the tip to the hilt.

While stepping right, you and your partner throw a number 1 cut such that the blades clash. Then stepping left, throw a number 2 cut. Repeat with a number 3 and 4, stepping right and left respectively. This is known as the 1-2-3-4 pattern.

Once you can do this without error, extend the drill to include cuts 5 thru 8. Step right on odd numbers, left on evens. For cuts 5 thru 8 the blades will pass each other without touching.

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This exercise shall serve as part of your warmup before each lesson.

**Exercise 8 The Sword Dance Part II**

Refer to Chapter 1 for the basics of the sword dance. Having done it a couple of times, we can alter our warmup to be a bit more complicated.

In this variant, you will be performing a number 1 cut with a step to the right between each normal cut. This is known as the 1-1-1-2 pattern. Continue it all the way to 1-8.

Once that pattern is well established, change to the 2-1-2-2 pattern. This is the same as above, except that there is a number 2 cut with a step to the left between each normal cut.
Chapter 2 – The Primary Guards of Manciolino

There are ten primary guards in Manciolino’s text. In due course each will be covered in depth, but for now it is important to simply be able to recognize each.

General Advice on the Guards

Antonio Manciolino

Thus do the high guards relate to the low wards: that the principles of the high guards is striking, and naturally the warding subsequently; and of the low guards contrarily is warding the principle, and then striking subsequently; but in these low ones alone is the giving of the thrust the natural strike.

Here Manciolino is telling us the main difference between high and low guards is that you need to be assertive in the high guards and attack first. While in the low guards you can with for the opponent to make the first move.

Also, thrusts come more naturally from the low guards. So if someone is waiting in a low guard don’t think that he’ll necessarily be waiting for you to attack.

Antonio Manciolino

In the art of the spada da filo, one is not to depart from the low guards, because they are safer than the high ones, and the reason is, that lying in high guard, you can be reached by a thrust or a cut to the leg, and in the low ones there is not this danger.

The term “spada da filo” means “sword with an edge” or a real sword. Manciolino teaches fencing both as a sport and as preparation for real combat. Given that, it is important to know which techniques are good for showing off and impressing the audience and which to rely on when your life is on the line.

Further Reading

Opera Nova, Introduction

Guardia Alta – High Guard

Antonio Manciolino

The first guard will be called “alta”, because meeting in combat we must gracefully hold the sword over the body, and gripped with the arm elevated as much as it can be, in such a fashion that the sword comes to rest to the rear, and the arm with the buckler must extend well forward toward the enemy as much as it can, and the right foot must stretch out about four fingers ahead of the left, with the heel a little raised, and both knees being straight and not bent.

One can also do this guard in two other ways, namely either with the right foot making a large pace forward, or with the left, also with the same large pace, holding the sword and the buckler in the way as above, and always the sword is found gripped with the arm extended into the air, the feet being in the way that comfort requires; always it is called “guardia alta” because of the designation, not of the feet, but of the settlement that is taken by the sword.

This posture was used in our salute on page 4. When you form this with the right foot forward, be sure to pull the sword hand as back as possible. Otherwise you risk your hand being struck.

Also, avoid allowing the tip to drop behind you. This looks sloppy and makes it take longer to throw blows.
Marozzo notes that this guard is used primarily for attacking.

**Further Reading**
Opera Nova, Book 1, Chapter 1
dell’Arte delle Armi, Chapter 140

**Exercise 1 Cutting with Alta**
While standing in Alta with the feet close together, perform each of the cuts 1 thru 7. Each cut should pass through the head, even the rising cuts 3 and 4 should be aimed for the chin such that your hand doesn’t drop too far.

As you perform these cuts, step forwards or backwards with either foot. Try chaining together multiple cuts as shown in the exercises from chapter 1.

**Exercise 2 Parrying with the Buckler**
For this exercise you need two fencers, the agent and the patient. The agent will start in Guardia Alta and throw each of the seven primary cuts.

The patient will also stand in Alta with the buckler extended. As each descending or horizontal blow is thrown, the patient will step towards the attack such that he stops the cut with the edge of his buckler. For rising cuts, the defender should try to smother the cut by catching it where the dome and face of the buckler meet.

At first, the patient should only have a buckler. But once he can reliably parry attacks, the patient may add a sword and start counter-attacking while the buckler wards off the agent’s cut.

**Guardia di Testa (Head Guard)**

**Antonio Manziolo**

The second is called “guardia di testa” which is made with equal and even extension of both arms toward the enemy in this fashion: that when you will have extended your fists, they will be found between and at the height of the shoulders, differing only in this, that the sword hand must lie somewhat lower than that of the buckler. But coming to the feet, I say that they can be found in two ways, either with the right or with the left forward in large pace, and nonetheless it will be the same guard, for the aforesaid reason.

Either foot can be forward, but the left is more common. Another source, known as Anonimo Bolognese (Anonymous Bolognese in English), adds “the buckler must held on the edge of the sword to cover the finger”. Given all this, Guardia di Testa looks like this illustration from I.33.

Looking closely, you can see the thumb of the left hand gripping the blade. This isn’t always done, but can be useful for reinforcing the sword or when switching to grappling at close range.

Marozzo says that this is a good guard for both offense and defense, or as he says you “can be both agente and paciente”.

**Further Reading**
Opera Nova, Book 1, Chapter 1
Arte dell’ Armi, Chapter 143
MS I.33, Various Illustrations
Exercise 3 Attacks from Guardia di Testa

Marozzo tells us to practice the following attacks from Guardia di Testa before moving on:

- Thrust from the right over the hand
- Mandritto Fendente
- Mandritto Tondo
- Mandritto Sgualeembrato
- Falso Dritto

Finally he says to,

“Achille Marozzo

From this head guard, thou wilt make [the student] proceed with a thrust from the left in his adversary’s face, and advance his left leg in front of the right, rather sideways to the left, and point his sword straight in his adversary’s face. He will thus find himself in the Guardia d’intrare.

Since Guardia d’intrare isn’t one of Manciolino’s primary guards, we shall not be studying in depth at this time.

Guardia di Faccia (Face Guard)

Antonio Manciolino

The third is called “guardia di faccia” which agrees with the previous one in two things, and differs in only one; namely, that it agrees not only in that the disposition of the feet can be with the right foot as well as with the left facing, but also in the height of the arms. But in this alone is the difference, that the aforesaid was having the sword on the diagonal, and this one holds it straight with the point toward the enemy’s face, and the hand armed with the buckler above the hand appointed to the sword.

The third guard is Guardia di Faccia. This is simply Guardia di Testa with the point straight forward and the sword hand under the buckler hand.

Like Guardia di Testa, Marozzo says that this is a guard for both attacking and defending.

Further Reading

Opera Nova, Book 1, Chapter 1
Arte dell’ Armi, Chapter 143

Exercise 4 Parrying with a Thrust

Marozzo tells us that if someone attacks using a mandritto tondo or fendente dritto (horizontal or vertical cut from the right), you can use a thrust to both parry and attack at the same time.

1: The agent shall stand in Guardia Alta, the patient in Guardia di Faccia with either foot forward.

2: The agent shall cut a mandritto tondo (#5 cut) or fendente dritto (#7 cut) to the head.

3: As the cut begins, the patient will immediate counter with a thrust to the face.

When you perform this exercise, concentrate on completing the thrust correctly with the palm up and point aimed at the face. The hilt will be somewhat lower than the point. Avoid thinking too much about the parry, as that will often cause you to parry wide such that neither the parry nor the attack is effective.
As for footwork, step forward and slightly diagonally to the left with the lead foot. With this type of counter, you are far safer stepping towards the blade than away from it, as it will push the blade away from the center line where it could otherwise injure you.

Guardia di Sopra il Braccio (Overarm Guard)

Antonio Manziolino

The fourth is called “guardia di sopra il braccio” because the hand that grips the sword comes to lie in the manner of a cross in the middle of the left arm, holding the point to the rear, and in consequence the buckler arm is very extended toward the enemy.

Regarding the feet, I say that in this first manner the right must be only so far forward of the left as not to touch it. One could furthermore do this same guard when the right foot makes the pace large, bending itself inward somewhat with the height of grace. And thus arranged in this guard, although the sword hand does not move from the place where it was above, that is, from the middle of the arm (because otherwise it would change the name for the reason said in the first guard) nonetheless the arms would come to elongate themselves somewhat, which previously were tucked in, so that the right shoulder comes to face opposite the enemy in the manner of delivering a blow to him wherever it seems best to you.

This guard is only seen with the buckler.

Further Reading
Opera Nova, Book 1, Chapter 1

Exercise 5 Expansion and Contraction with Sopra il Braccio

With the over- and under-arm guards, expansion and contraction become especially important. This drill will help you develop the flow necessary to use this.

Pattern 1-1
1: Start in Guardia Alta begin a Mandritto Squalembrato (cut #1). As your sword goes forward, increase the right foot.
2: As soon as your blade reaches full extension, gather back the right foot while the sword goes into Sopra il Braccio.
3: Immediately cut another Mandritto Squalembrato into Guardia di Faccia with an increase of the right foot.

Pattern 1-5
1: Start in Guardia Alta begin a Mandritto Squalembrato (cut #1). As your sword goes forward, increase the right foot.
2: As soon as your blade reaches full extension, gather back the right foot while the sword goes into Sopra il Braccio.
3: Immediately throw a fendente (cut #7) cut into Guardia di Testa with an increase of the right foot.

Pattern 1-2
1: Start in Guardia Alta begin a Mandritto Squalembrato (cut #1). As your sword goes forward, increase the right foot.
2: As soon as your blade reaches full extension, gather back the right foot while the sword goes into Sopra il Braccio.
3: Immediately throw a Rivsero Squalembrato (cut #2) into Coda Lunga e Alta while passing with the left foot.

Pattern 1-6
1: Start in Guardia Alta begin a Mandritto Squalembrato (cut #1). As your sword goes forward, increase the right foot.
2: As soon as your blade reaches full extension, gather back the right foot while the sword goes into Sopra il Braccio.
3: Immediately throw a Rivsero Tondo (cut #6) into Coda Lunga e Alta while passing with the left foot.

**Pattern 1-4**

1: Start in Guardia Alta begin a Mandritto Squalembrato (cut #1). As your sword goes forward, increase the right foot.

2: As soon as your blade reaches full extension, gather back the right foot while the sword goes into Sopra il Braccio.

3: Immediately throw a Rivsero Ridoppio (cut #4) into a wide Alta while passing with the left foot.

**Guardia di Sotto il Braccio (Underarm Guard)**

*Antonio Manciolo*

The fifth is called “guardia di sotto il braccio”, because the sword hand must lie under the buckler arm, that is, holding the sword under the armpit, so that the point faces toward the rear, but the buckler arm will be well extended toward the enemy; but of the feet, I say that the right must adopt the manner described above here, that is, forward of the left, either a little or in large pace. But if you will hold it in large pace, it behooves you to arrange your right shoulder toward the enemy in the appointed fashion described in the fourth guard.

This is another guard that is only used with the buckler. Here we see it depicted by Hans Talhoffer. It is also found in MS I.33, where it is referred to as First Ward.

**Further Reading**

Opera Nova, Book 1, Chapter 1

**Exercise 6 Expansion and Contraction with Sotto il Braccio**

Repeat exercise 4, except using Sotto il Braccio. You should be able to use all of the same patterns except 1-1.

**Porta di Ferro Stretta (Narrow Iron Gate)**

*Antonio Manciolo*

The sixth guard is called “porta di ferro stretta”. In which the body must be arranged diagonally in such fashion that the right shoulder (as is said above) faces the enemy, but both the arms must be stretched out to encounter the enemy, so that the sword arm is extended straight down in the defense of the right knee, and so that the sword fist be near and centered on the aforesaid knee. But that of the buckler must be extended and straight indeed toward the enemy, neither higher nor lower than in guardia di testa. Regarding the feet, the right must be settled in large pace with the knee similarly opposite from the enemy, thereby defended by the guard, and somewhat bent, and the left on the diagonal, also with its knee somewhat bent. And this is therefore called “narrow iron door” through being the most secure among all the others, and exceedingly strong like iron, and that unlike the wide (of which will be treated immediately below), the sword draws nigh to the enemy, restraining itself equally in defense of the knee.

Normally iron gate stances are right-foot forward with the hand above or inside the knee. Narrow refers to the narrow opening resulting from the raised point and the hand close to the knee.
Further Reading
Opera Nova, Book 1, Chapter 1
Arte dell’ Armi, Chapter 142

Exercise 7 Dui-Tempi (Two-Time) Counters
A useful feature of Porta di Ferro Stretta is that it can quickly “close the door” against basic attacks. Here is a drill that illustrates that principal.

1: The agent stands in Guardia Alta, the patient in Porta di Ferro Stretta.
2: The agent attacks with a Mandritto Squalembrato (cut #1).
3: The patient counters by stepping into the attack while parrying with the true edge of the sword.
4: The patient then immediately thrusts into the face or chest.

Repeat this exercise using a Riverso Squalembrato (cut #2). The patient will continue to parry with the true edge.

This is called a dui-tempi action because the parry is a separate movement from the counter-attack. Contrast this with the stesso-tempo (single time) action used in Exercise 3.

Porta di Ferro Larga (Wide Iron Gate)

Antonio Manciolino
The seventh guard is called “porta di ferro larga”, and this originates from the previously described, because neither the feet nor the body are moved from the appearance of the above. Only that the sword hand is moved from the knee and hangs with the point toward the ground going to the inside of the right knee, making the body more uncovered than does the preceding guard.

Any time the point is near the ground, you can add “larga” to the name of the guard.

Marozzo says that this guard, like Cinghiara Porta di Ferro, can only make attacks with the point or false edge. Between the two, the false edge is preferable.

Further Reading
Opera Nova, Book 1, Chapter 1
Arte dell’ Armi, Chapter 142

Exercise 8 Using the Falso
In this exercise we see how the falso may be used to parry attacks. The agent will begin in Alta, while the patient waits in Porta di Ferro Larga.

The agent will step forward using a Fendente (#7 cut). The patient will counter this by increasing the front foot slightly while striking the opponent’s sword with the false (back) edge of his sword. The goal isn’t the stop the incoming blow, but rather just nudge it off course by hitting the flat (side) of the blade.

When performed correctly, the agent loses little or no momentum in his cut. But instead of hitting his intended target, his blow is continued downwards and may even strike the ground.
**Cinghiara Porta di Ferro (Wild Boar Iron Gate)**

*Antonio Manziolino*

The eighth guard is called “cingiara porta di ferro”, in which the left foot is settled diagonally, bending the knee a little, but the right leg must remain straight. And as for the hands, that of the sword must rest with the fist in front of the left knee as you did in that of porta di ferro, whence also it derived a large part of its name, but the left will be extended in defense of the head, with the buckler forward as was said a little while ago; and therefore it is called “wild boar” after the animal that has such a name, which while it approaches attacking, arranges itself with its head and tusks diagonally in the aforesaid manner of striking.

To be more specific, this is Cinghiara Porta di Ferro Stretta. Porta di Ferro (iron gate) because it is in front, Cinghiara (wild boar) because it is over the left knee, and Stretta (close) because the hand is low and the point up.

Marozzo tells us that whenever you form this guard you must remain patient, as the low guards are more for parrying than for striking. He continues, “However, should he want to attack, thou knowest that this can only be done with the point, or the false edge.”

**Further Reading**

Opera Nova, Book 1, Chapter 1
Ars dell’ Armi, Chapter 139

**Exercise 9 Falso or Thrust**

In this drill, the agent will again start in Alta. The patient will begin in Porta di Ferro Stretta or Cinghiara Porta di Ferro. The agent may make any of the seven primary cuts. The patient will respond with a thrust or falso as he see fit such that the cut is parried. If the patient may attempt to land his own blow at the same time, but only if he can do so while still parrying the attack.

**Coda Lunga e Alta (Long and High Tail Guard)**

*Antonio Manziolino*

The ninth guard is called “coda lunga alta”, with the left foot forward, the knee bent a little, and the foot must be straight toward the enemy in large pace, the right arm well extended toward the enemy with the sword well gripped diagonally, so that the point is aimed well at the enemy, the buckler arm well extended also toward the enemy’s face; and not only this guard but also the following have their origins from a guard called “coda lunga alta” in which the feet are arranged in the aforesaid fashion, but the arm is held with the sword extended straight back, which gave it its name through metaphor, as is said in the common proverb, that one must not meddle with great masters because they have the long tail, that is, they can harm you through their numerous followers; thus, such guard gives the same name to this ninth, and to the tenth. Because of being very apt for reaching and harming your companion, it therefore holds the name of “coda lunga alta”.

Marozzo warns that this guard is better used defensively.
Coda Lunga e Stretta (Long and Narrow Tail Guard)

Antonio Manciulino

The tenth guard is called “coda lunga stretta”, with the right foot forward in large pace, in a way nonetheless that the knee is a little bent somewhat diagonally, and both arms must lie as was said above, except that the sword arm repose somewhat lower. And the aforesaid ten guards will be sufficient for our work.

Marozzo says this guard is both offensive and defensive. He also notes that the thumb should be turned down.

Further Reading
Opera Nova, Book 1, Chapter 1
Arte dell’ Armi, Chapter 138

Low Guard Summary
Since there are several low guards with similar names, so here is a summary to help you remember them.

First, is the hilt to the left or right?

- Cinghiara Porta di Ferro (Wild Boar Iron Gate): Over the left knee
- Porta di Ferro (Iron Gate): Over the right knee
- Coda Lunga (Long Tail): Outside the right knee

Then, is the hilt and point high or low?

- ... Alta (High): Hilt somewhat high, point up
- ... Stretta (Close/narrow): Hilt just above knee, point up
- ... Larga (Large/wide): Hilt just above knee, point down
- ... Distesa (Extended): Hilt low, point behind you (Coda Lunga only)

Generally speaking, if your left foot is forward you will be in a Cinghiara variant or Coda Lunga Alta. However, there are occasional exceptions in the manuals.
Footwork 2 – Passing and Offline Steps

Slope Step
A slope step is simple an advancing step that moves at an angle instead of directly forward. Unless otherwise qualified, a slope step is done at roughly a 45 degree angle.

In the image below you can see a footwork diagram that may have been used for practicing slope and triangle steps.

Compass Step
The compass step is simply a slope step that also changes the direction you are facing.

Circles such as this from Marozzo would have been used for practicing compass steps.

Passing Step
The passing step allows one to change lead feet. The length of the step will depend on whether you wish to widen or narrow your stance.

Passing steps can be forward for backwards. They can also be done as a sloping or compass step.
Exercise 9 Stepping into the Guards
Forms, known as “assaulti” in Italian, are an important part of how Bolognese fencing is taught. An assault could be quite long. For example, Marozzo’s first assault has 7 parts, the first part containing 21 steps. While it is too soon for an historic assault, this modern form can be used for memorizing the guards and practicing basic footwork.

1: Stand upright with the feet together, your buckler at your tight and your sword point lowered just in front of your right foot.

2: Step diagonally forward with the right foot, striking the dome of your buckler with the false edge of your sword.

3: Raise the sword high and extend the buckler straight forward, thus you stand in Guardia Alta.

4: Pass forward with the left foot, striking the inside edge of the buckler such that you end in Guardia di Testa.

5: Lower the point, and then thrust into Guardia di Faccia with the palm up while passing forward with the right foot. As you do this, the buckler should cover the top of your hand.

6: Turn the palm down, then gather the right foot back while cutting a Falso Tondo into Guardia di Sopra il Bracco.

7: Immediately increase the right foot while cutting a Riverso into Porta di Ferro Stretta.

8: Follow this with a Mandritto into Sotto il Bracco while again gathering back the right foot.

9: Increase the right foot again while you cut a descending Riverso that returns you to Porta di Ferro Stretta.

10: Without moving your foot, lower the sword into Porta di Ferro Larga.

11: Slash up with a Falso Dritto followed by a Mandritto while passing to the left such that you end in Cinghiara Porta di Ferro.

12: Slash up with a Falso Manco followed by a Riverso while passing with the right foot, thus bringing you into Coda Lunga e Stretta.

13: Slash up with a Falso Dritto followed by a Riverso while passing with the left foot into Coda Lunga e Alta.

14: Gather back the left foot while raising the sword for a salute, then lower the sword and buckler to the initial position.

Exercise 10 Offensive or Defensive?
For each Manciolino’s 10 primary guards, indicated whether it is meant to be used offensively, defensively, or both.

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Chapter 3 – Core Techniques

This chapter will look at some of the core techniques that make up Bolognese fencing. The plays will be mostly drawn from Manciolo’s book, but the order will be changed. Manciolo presents all of the plays for a guard before moving onto the next guard, which is useful as a reference manual but isn’t the best pedagogically. So instead we’ll be rotating through the guards, taking a play or two from each in turn.

For most exercises, both fencers will be starting in the same guard. While this wouldn’t necessarily happen in a real fight, it is the way Manciolo structured his examples.

The Montante

The Montante is a true edge cut that is performed “in the manner of the falso”, which is to say that it rises up from below at a steep angle. It is often used from Guardia Alta and Guardia di Testa.

Guardia Alta: Keeping the hand high and slightly to the right of center, allow the point of the sword to drop by your left side. Then cut upwards with the true edge such that the blade passes as close to the left edge of the buckler as possible. This cut should be nearly vertical and end back in Guardia Alta.

Guardia di Testa: Raise the sword hand slightly so that you may turn the point down and touch the dome of the buckler with the false edge of your sword. Again, the hand should stay slight right of center. Then immediately cut upwards, nearly vertically, with the true edge such that you end in Guardia Alta.

By keeping the hand high to the right while the blade is angled to the left, you form what’s known in other fencing traditions as a “hanging parry”. This can be used as defensive action just prior to performing a strong rising cut.

Exercise 1 Three Strikes to the Hand (Guardia Alta)

Manciolo, Chapter 3, Play 1

In the illustration of Guardia Alta the sword hand and arm are often depicted as pulled back behind the shoulder. This is done to protect your hand and arm from attacks while preparing your own blow. However, in the heat of battle a fencer may not be able to form the ideal Alta and instead have to settle for one with the arm somewhat forward.

Manciolo begins his collection of Alta plays by showing is how to punish an opponent who brings his hand too far forward while in Alta. The drills begins as such:

1: Both fencers stand in Guardia Atla with either foot forward.

2: The agent steps forward slightly while cutting a Mandritto (cut #1) to the hand.

3: Whether or not this is parried, the agent will then follow with a Riverso (cut #2) to the hand.

4: Finally, the agent will perform a Montante (cut #8) to the hand.

Manciolo’s theory for this play is that the patient fencer cannot lower his hand to make his own attack while the agent is constantly threatening it.

Note that this drill assumes that a simple hilt is being used. If the opponent is using a complex hilt that protects the hand, aim for the wrist or forearm instead.

Variation A

Instead of targeting the hand with the Montante, you can instead aim it for the gap between the opponent’s sword and buckler. This gives you the option for a cut to the chest, a cut to the face, and an Imbrocatta (descending thrust) to the chest.

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When using this variation, you should step forward and place your buckler against the opponent’s sword arm, pushing it up and back, so that he cannot perform any action with it.

**Variation B**

This variant uses what the masters call “Montante like thrust”. It is used when the opponent tries to flee by retreating out of measure.

After the Riverso, lower your point as if you were going to perform a Montante. Begin the cut as normal, but only raise the tip as high as the opponent’s right shoulder. At that point you’ll mutate the cut into a thrust by turning your true edge towards the opponent’s blade while pushing the point forward.

**Variation C**

*Manziolino, Chapter 3, Play 2*

This third variation chains together Alta plays 1 and 2. Start by performing the Mandritto, and possibly the Riverso, to the hand. Then if the opportunity presents itself, push your buckler up high to defend your head while you cut a Riverso to his thigh.

Note here that Manziolino doesn’t indicate if the Riverso to the thigh should be done with a rising or descending blow. It is common for this text to just say Mandritto or Riverso while letting the context determine at which angle the blow should be performed.

If the opponent attempts to hit your head in this variant, cut his hand with a sideways falso, this lower your buckler just enough to put your sword into Sorpa il Braccio (over-arm guard).

**Exercise 2 Feinting the Montante (Guardia Alta)**

*Manziolino, Chapter 3, Play 3*

Note: This exercise can be performed as written, or it can be chained from the play seen in exercise 1.

Both fencers begin in Guardia Alta. The agent prepares for a Montante by lowering his tip and cutting up past his buckler without moving either foot. Then instead of completing the cut, the agent steps “boldly forward” with the left foot while transitioning into Guardia di Testa.

This action will entice the patient to use a counter-cut as his parry. The patient’s blow may land against the agents sword while is he charged for the Montante or, preferably just after he transitions into Guardia di Testa.

Either way, as soon as the patient’s blow is spent, the agent will step to the right while cutting a Mandritto to the patient’s head. This is followed by compassing the left foot behind the right while returning to Guardia di Testa.

**Exercise 3 Countering with a Void and the Montante like Thrust (Guardia Alta)**

*Manziolino, Chapter 4, Play 2*

Manziolino tells us that all attacks against someone in Guardia Alta can be countered using one of two techniques. We’ll be looking at the second method, which combines the concept of expansion and contraction with the Montante like thrust.

As the attack is being made, throw the right foot well behind the left. At the same time, prepare a Montante. As mentioned before, this preparation effectively creates a hanging parry.

As soon as the attack is parried, begin the Montante like thrust into Guardia di Faccia. You may pass forward while doing so if the opponent flees. But if he is close enough, you can land this thrust without moving either foot.
This counter works by moving you just outside the attacker’s measure (range). This is known as a “void” in later fencing manuals. You then take advantage of the fact that thrusts have a longer reach than cuts. Another advantage you have is that you can step forward faster than most opponents can step backwards.

**Tempo for Attack**
The Bolognese author dall’Agocchie says that “There are five ways of recognizing this tempo of attacking.”

- The first one is that once you’ve parried your enemy’s blow, then it’s a tempo to attack.
- The second, when his blow has passed outside your body, that’s a tempo to follow it with the most convenient response.
- The third, when he raises his sword to harm you: while he raises his hand, that’s the tempo to attack.
- The fourth, as he injudiciously moves from one guard to go into another, before he’s fixed in that one, then it’s a tempo to harm him.
- The fifth and last, when the enemy is fixed in guard, and he raises or moves his forward foot in order to change pace or approach you, while he raises his foot, that’s a tempo for attacking him, because he can’t harm you as a result of being unsettled.

Many of the counters we’ll see take advantage of one or more of the tempi for attacking. For example, we’ll be using the second reason for the voids we see in Exercise 3 and 4.

**Exercise 4 Another Void (Guardia di Testa)**
*Maniolino, Chapter 5/6, Play 1*

Aside from Guardia Alta, Manciolino offers one list of plays for each guard spread across two chapters. In the first chapter, you see each play from the agent’s perspective. In the second chapter, you see the counter to each play in the same order.

For our first Guardia di Testa play, both fencers begin in the aforementioned guard with the left foot forward. The agent will attack to the face, flank, or thigh as he sees fit. This attack will be performed with a passing slope step as to get around the buckler.

**Counter**
For the counter, the patient will throw the right foot behind the left just as we saw in exercise 3, except this time he will end in Coda Lunga e Alta. That is to say, the hand will be to the right of the knee, roughly waist (natural, not hip) high, and extended somewhat forward.

The moment the Mandritto passes by, the patient will thrust to the face with a passing step. His sword being to the patient’s right, the thrust may be pushed to the left by a parry. If this happens, don’t resist. Instead, allow the blade to swing around for a Mandritto to the face.

**Meeting Strength with Weakness**
In exercise four, we saw an example of meeting strength with weakness. When the agent attempted to parry the patient’s thrust, the patient could have tried to resist. But since thrusts are weak against properly timed counter-cuts, resisting would have been fruitless. So instead, the patient takes the energy created by the parry and uses it to power the Mandritto that circles around the head.

In exercise 6, we’ll see another example of using this concept to turn a thrust into a Stramazzone.
The Stramazzone and the Molinello
A Molinello or “spinning wheel” is any cut that is performed in a circular manner can be rightly called a Molinello. It doesn’t matter if the cut is thrown from the wrist, elbow, or shoulder, just so long as the tip traces out close to a full circle.

A Stramazzone is a specific kind of Molinello. Meaning “turn of the wrist”, it refers to a small but surprisingly powerful cut made from the wrist. To perform this, drop the tip and let it fall to the left. Then continue that motion around the circle so that you perform a nearly vertical Riverso.

When used with a buckler, the Stramazzone is usually performed with the sword and buckler wrists touching. This version of the Stramazzone is almost always performed along the left side of the buckler.

Exercise 5 The Stramazzone From both Sides
From a comfortable posture, extend the sword arm directly forward. Allow the point to fall to the left. Then turning the sword at the wrist, allow the point to rise from the left and descend on the right in an arc such that you cut along the #1 line. As you complete the cut, allow it to loop around in order to cut a #1 again. Repeat until you can smoothly perform five cuts in a row.

Repeat this exercise, allowing the point to fall to the right and cut along the #2 line. Again, repeat until you can smoothly chain five #2 cuts together.

Next, alternate cutting a #1 and a #2. Again, #1 cuts should start by falling to the left, #2 cuts by falling to the right.

As you perform these exercises, make sure you keep the sword hand loose. You cannot perform the Stramazzone if you grip the sword too tightly.

Exercise 6 The Stramazzone with the Buckler
For this exercise, a smaller buckler (8 to 10”) will be easier to use.

For the first variant, extend the buckler hand forward and close to the sword hand. Let the point fall to the left, under the buckler, and then cut a #1 that passes by the left side of the buckler. The wrist of your sword arm will be under that of your buckler. Practice chaining two #1 cuts together.

Return to a neutral position with both arms extended. Drop the point to the right, and then cut a #2 such that the wrist of your sword arm goes over the wrist of your buckler arm. Then let the point fall to the left, cut a #1 that uncrosses your arms.

Exercise 6 Converting a Thrust into a Cut (Guardia di Testa)
Manciolino, Chapter 5/6, Play 2

For this exercise, both fencers will begin in Guardia di Testa with the left foot forward.

The agent will begin by lower the point slightly and, while passing forward with the right foot, thrust into the face. The right foot should step slight to the left so that it is in line with the patient’s right foot. This will help push the patient’s sword off-line.

As you, the agent, perform the thrust, turn the true edge slightly to the left. You don’t want it at 90 degrees, but rather just enough that your edge instead of your flat makes contact with the patient’s blade.

If the patient parries the thrust to the agent’s right, the agent shall perform a Stramazzone that goes under his buckler, and then over the patients sword arm. This is done while performing a passing step to the left with the left foot.
Counter
To counter this attack, the patient will first parry the thrust to his left (the agent’s right). The patient then immediately places his sword under his buckler, and flicks the point to the agent’s hand such that it interrupts the Stramazzone.

Exercise 7 Interrupting a Cut with a Thrust (Guardia di Faccia)
Mancioli, Chapter 7/8, Play 2

This exercise demonstrates the third tempo for attacking. It begins with both fencers in Guardia di Faccia with the right foot forward.

1: The agent will leave Guardia di Faccia by pulling his sword up for a Mandritto.

2: The patient will increase his lead foot, pushing a thrust to the face or chest at the same time the agent is pulling up his sword.

Exercise 8 The Disengage (Guardia di Faccia)
Mancioli, Chapter 7/8, Play 1

This exercise demonstrates the effectiveness of the disengage. This term means to move the sword from one side of the opponent’s weapon to the other, usually by dropping the tip and quickly raising it back up the other side.

1: The agent will increase his right foot while thrusting to the face or chest.

2: The patient will dip the point of his sword beneath the agent’s sword, then raise it back up on the other side. While doing this, perform a “mezzo volta of the hand”, which is to say that you turn the hand half way around such that the true edge is now facing to the right. All of this is accompanied with a passing step to the left with the left foot.

Exercise 9 A Parry with the Falso (Guardia di Faccia)
Mancioli, Chapter 7/8, Play 3

1: The agent will begin by passing to the left while cutting a Stramazzone under his buckler and over the patient’s sword arm.

2: The patient will counter by cutting a falso into the Agent’s Stramazzone. If done correctly, this will cut the agent’s face in the same action.
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