



Bolognese Swordsmanship

The Order of the Seven Hearts

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Lesson 0 The Bolognese School

Bologna, the capital city of the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy has been a center of cultural fervor, innovation and learning since the early Middle Ages. Bologna started its life as an Etruscan city around 650 BC (Felsina), and was re-named Bononia by the Gauls when they conquered the city in the 2nd Century BC. After being a Roman province, it changed hands first to the Byzantines, then to the Lombards, who perhaps sparked the city's martial spirit. During the Middle Ages, Bologna became an important Commune (City State). The jewel in the city's crown has always been the university, which has attracted and produced world-class International scholars since the year 1088.

Among the arts developed in the cultural center of Bologna, fencing was to become one of the city's longest traditions. Thanks to the primary sources as well as Gelli and Novati, we have a sense of a genealogy of Masters which, direct or indirect, proves how many important figures Bologna produced in this field:

- Nerio, active in Bologna as early as the 1300's
- Lippo Dardi, operating in the early to mid 1400's. Besides a fencing master, he was a mathematician, astronomer and University professor
- Guido Antonio De Luca (active around the beginning of the 1500's), "from whose school came more warriors than from the belly of the Trojan Horse" (Marozzo, introduction)
- Antonio Manciolino, who published the first extant Bolognese treatise sometime around the 1520's (?) and whose second 1531 edition is widely available today
- Achille Marozzo, pupil of De Luca, who published his Opera Nova in 1536, one of the most complete and fascinating among the extant 16th-Century Italian treatises. Its popularity at the time accounts for numerous subsequent editions that carried Marozzo's teachings into the 17th Century
- A recently-discovered Anonymous, who wrote an informative draft manuscript copy in the Bolognese style (I would date it around 1550)
- Angelo Viggiani, who published posthumously in 1575
- Giovanni Dall'Agocchie, whose 1572 Dell'Arte di Scrimia excels for its clarity and organization
- The Cavalcabo' dynasty, which spread as far as England and France well into the 17th Century
- Alessandro Senese, who published his treatise in 1660

Our class will focus on the teachings of Manciolino, Marozzo, the Anonymous, Viggiani and Dall'Agocchie.

The goal of this class is to teach you how to understand and perform all the fundamentals of the style. By the end of these three days, you will hopefully be able to "think in Bolognese," to defend against any opponent's attack with style and effectiveness as well as to successfully provoke him to give you a tempo in which you can successfully strike him without being hit.

We will roughly follow Dall'Agocchie's progression, which he calls "I sei capi" (roughly translated into "the six chief skills"). These are:

1. Knowledge of the sword's edges
2. The guards
3. The strikes
4. The steps
5. Knowing how to defend against every strike
6. Knowledge of the half-sword (which we will not have time for)

All major logical units in this class are grouped under a Lesson. As you take this booklet home with you, please review each lesson so as to remember what we did and talked about this weekend.

Lesson 1 The sword



1530's Civilian Sword (41" blade, 1" wide at ricasso)

Firstly, the perfect courtier should be adept in the use of all weapons, both on foot and on horseback, knowing all their advantages and disadvantages. Even more so, he should be intimately familiar with the weapons used among gentlemen. While on the battlefield a few subtleties are lost, it often happens that a dispute between two gentlemen gives rise to combat, and that combat takes place with whatever weapons the two happen to have at hand. This is why such broad knowledge leads to safety. (Baldassarre Castiglione, 1528).

The question of which sword may have been used in the Bolognese style is one of the most debated in the WMA community. But as the quotation above suggests, the answer is probably much easier than we imagine. The style was not designed to be a "user's manual" for a particular sword-type; rather, it was a universal set of instructions aimed at knowing how to use most swords—or indeed most edged weapons. Marozzo (Chapter 25, 137) in fact tells us that a great number of actions and principles apply to a gamut of weapons and weapon-combinations going from the single dagger to the sword (with or without companion weapons) and even to the spadone.

Since it is amply documented that the style was used in both military and civilian situations, it follows that both military and civilian swords would have been used. Thus any non-specialized sword used in the 16th Century would be a good fit to learn the Bolognese style. Manciolino (3v) also mentions that different blade-lengths may be used, saying that practicing with shorter swords is a good way to learn parrying.

Hilt-types illustrated by Marozzo and Viggiani range from a simple cross to rapier-like structures like AVB Norman's type 74 (aptly dated around the 1560's). Viggiani (54r) mentions the additional protection to the hand added to hilts in recent years, which matches what we know about the evolution of the sword in the 16th Century.

Given the style's high speed mentioned by Masters (Viggiani, 54v, Anonymous 17v), I recommend that the sword be not too heavy, with 2 ½ lbs being close to the upper limit.

Structurally, Bolognese masters recognize and name the sword's **true** and **false edges** as well as the **forte** and **debole**. Parries executed with the false edge employ the sword's **debole**, while those executed with the true edge employ the **forte** (e.g. Dall'Agocchie, 21r).



Early 16th Century Military Sword

Among the other weapons used are:

- Single-handed sword (spada)
- Single-handed sharp sword (spada da filo)
- Spadone (spada a due mani)
- Dagger (pugnale)
- Small buckler (brocchiero piccolo or stretto)
- Large buckler (brocchiero largo)
- Rotella
- Targa
- Imbracciatura
- Cape (cappa)
- Left-handed mailed glove (guanto da presa)
- Armor (any parts)
- Halberd (alabarda)
- Partisan (partigiana)
- Spiedo
- Poleaxe (azza)
- Spear (lancia)
- Pike (picca)

Lesson 2 The guards

For her security, our gallant art of arms bears ten defensive guards with twenty different names. I have considered it useful to speak of them here; for if they are learned forthwith, they will turn the rest of my work into a spacious, useful and well-lit field. Let me therefore begin my exposition with the help of God. (Manciolino, 7r.)

Guards in the Bolognese school are as many as 21 (Anonymous, 6r and ff), depending on the Master listing them. To make their understanding easier and quicker, we will explore the main ways in which they are classified:

Firstly, guards can be high or low:

- **High guards:** all the guards featuring the sword-hand at shoulder-height or higher
- **Low guards:** all the guards featuring the sword-hand below shoulder-height

Secondly, low guards can be classified according to the placement of the sword-hand in relation to the right knee:

- Guards of **Porta di Ferro:** all the guards featuring the sword-hand to the inside of the right knee
- Guards of **Coda Lunga:** all the guards featuring the sword-hand to the outside of the right knee

Thirdly, low guards can be classified according to how “open” or “closed” they leave the swordsman’s body:

- A **larga** guard features the sword-point out of the opponent’s presence, generally pointing at the ground
- A **stretta** guard features the sword-point in the opponent’s presence, generally aimed at his face or chest

Fourthly, guards can bear different names depending on the placement of the feet, in particular:

- Whether the right or left foot is forward (e.g. Becca Possa and Becca Cesa)
- Whether the step is straight or oblique

To keep things simple, we will use only a handful of the most useful guards in the style—four high and four low:

High guards:

- Guardia Alta
- Guardia di Testa
- Guardia di Faccia
- Guardia d'Alicorno (same as Marozzo's Becca)



Low guards:

- Porta di Ferro Stretta
- Porta di Ferro Larga
- Coda Lunga e Stretta
- Coda Lunga e Larga



We may form either guard with the right foot or left foot forward depending on the drill and the situation (with the exception of Porta di Ferro).

In all guards (save for Alicorno in some situations) the right arm is straight but not locked.

The placement of the buckler is the same for all guards: pointed straight at the opponent, with the left arm extended. The main role of the buckler is that of creating a visual and physical "blind spot" for the opponent; as Di Grassi says, the closer to the opponent this defensive weapon is kept, the less of you he will see and the easier parrying will be (62, Italian edition).

Weight is on the foot that does not move. It is not bad form to lift the heel of the foot which is next to move, which is generally the rear foot. The size of the step is wide in *gioco largo* and narrow in the *gioco stretto* (Anonymous, 17v et al).

Rule: high guards are used offensively first, then defensively; low guards defensively first, then offensively. In the situation where low guards are used offensively, the only proper forms of attack are thrusts or *falsi* (Marozzo, Ch. 139, Manciolino, 4r). Occasionally, the *stramazzone* also appears as an offensive action from the low guards (e.g. Manciolino, 15r).

Eye-candy

Frequently asked question: is the sword in the sheath a guard? A bit of European Iaido from Pietro Monte, along with important advice on consecutive strikes.

As you unsheathe the sword, stand with your left foot forward and make a very visible feint to the opponent's head; in the same tempo, lower your weapon and unleash a thrust while entering close to the opponent with your right foot. Done in one tempo, this action is difficult to parry. However, proceed cautiously as I have advised you when speaking of executing two strikes in one tempo with the spear. The first should be short, the second extended. Similarly, with the sword you should perform two thrusts, one short to the upper parts, the other long to the lower body. (Monte, Book 2, Chapter 49)

Important rule: when two or more strikes follow one-another of which the first is a feint, the first must be shorter than the following one. This is also true of the steps accompanying such motions (if there are any).

Lesson 3

The order of strikes between the guards

Can you see how every strike (or motion) lies between two guards (or instances of stillness), and how every guard lies between two strikes? [...] We could even say that every action lies between two potentials and that every potential lies between two actions. A strike, while still enshrined in a guard, is not action but potential; when it is finally released, it becomes action. (Viggiani, 76r and ff.s)

This wonderfully eloquent statement suggests how, in the Bolognese style, strikes are nothing but forceful transitions between guards, with (ideally) as little departure from them as possible.

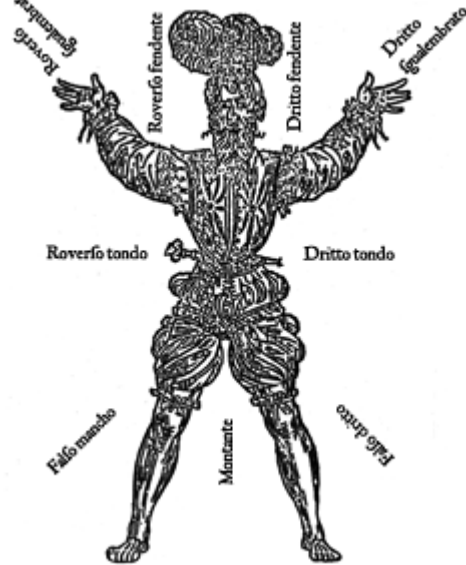
As with guards therefore, cuts and thrusts in the Bolognese school can be so many that it would make it confusing to list them and learn them all in this short time. Therefore, we will only use a selection of the most useful and frequently-employed forms of attack in a way that will hopefully be easy to remember.

Cuts are classified in several ways: the general direction (*mandritto*, *riverso*), the specific path (*fendente*, *tondo*, etc.), the edge with which they are delivered and even whether they are executed from the wrist in a wheel-like fashion (*stramazzone* and *mulinetto*).

For this class, we will keep it basic and use the generic term *fendente*, *montante*, *mandritto* and *riverso*, *falso dritto*, *falso manco*, and *stramazzone*.

- **Fendente:** a true-edge cut proceeding vertically downwards
- **Montante:** an ascending, false-edge cut proceeding exactly opposite the *fendente*
- **Mandritto:** generally the shorthand name for a *mandritto squalebrato*, i.e. a true-edge cut proceeding at a downward slant right-to-left

- **Riverso:** generally the shorthand name for a *riverso squalebrato*, i.e. a true-edge cut proceeding at a downward slant left-to-right; a **riverso ascendente** proceeds in the opposite direction
- **Falso dritto:** an ascending false-edge cut starting from the low right and proceeding high left in a path roughly opposite the *riverso*
- **Falso manco:** an ascending false-edge cut starting from the low left and proceeding high right in a path roughly opposite the *mandritto*
- **Stramazzone:** a fendente-like cut delivered with a wheel-like motion of the wrist (wrist breaks to the left)



Of the thrusts, we will use the *imbroccata*, *stoccata* and *punta riversa*:

- **Imbroccata** (also *punta sopramano*): an overhand thrust delivered mostly with a powerful extension of the arm
- **Stoccata** (also *punta sottomano*, *punta trivellata* or *punta in falso*): an underhand thrust delivered either with a powerful extension of the arm or through the motion of the foot (in this case bearing the name of *punta ferma*)
- **Punta riversa:** a thrust executed with the hilt turned to the inside in a manner similar to the *porta di ferro*

The technically correct delivery of the cut is accompanied by a turning of the body from the heels and hips (*volgimento di persona*), as with a tennis-shot or a golf-swing. Although this alone would take three days of practice, bear this in mind as you take this lesson with you (Viggiani, 66r).



There are **full strikes** and **half-strikes**. Full strikes go from a high to a *larga* guard (or vice-versa); half-strikes end in a *stretta* guard, regardless of where they begin. Naturally, this affects tempo as we will see.

In this style, there are simple strikes or redoubled strikes. **Simple strikes** are attacks featuring a single blow, whereas **redoubled strikes** are compound attacks. Redoubled strikes were praised as being more worthy of a good swordsman (besides being harder for the opponent to parry or to survive). In this class we will use the *stramazzone* as an easy way to multiply the strikes delivered to the opponent in the course of a single attack.

Lesson 4

The steps, measure and the straight line

Although the nimble steps of dancing are of great ornament and use to this art, they must be adapted to martial spirit. What is graceful and feminine must become manly and tough. When you enter that dusty and sun-beaten field before the eyes of all your peers, let them see you come out of the house of a master of war rather than dance. (Anonymous, 20r.)

The Bolognese style features the most diverse and imaginative stepping of any sword-art known to me. Still, the circumstances in which each step is used are very precise, and the execution of the steps should be as perfect as in a deadly dance.

The most common steps are the following (using Anonymous' classification, 9v and ff):

- **Passo**: what we moderns call the pass (rear foot moves forward), more or less on the straight line
- **Half-step** (mezzo passo): the forward motion of the front foot, which is also called accrescimento or the backward motion of the rear foot
- **Oblique pass** (passo traverso): passing with the left foot towards the opponent's right or with the right foot to the opponent's left; this can either be followed by another pass or by a **circular action of the foot that remains behind**, thereby ending with the feet on a new line with the opponent. This is one of the most useful steps in the style.
- **Multiple pass** (trapassare): two or more consecutive passes, especially of the oblique kind
- **Gathering step** (un piede spinge l'altro): this can be done forward or backward
- **Voiding of the foot** (levare di piedi): pulling back the leg that is being attacked without placing the foot on the ground, then replacing it where it was for the riposte
- Other notable stepping actions are the **cambio di piedi** (foot-swap) and the **ripresa di piedi**; the first consists of pulling the front foot back next to the rear and then passing forward with the latter; the second of pulling the rear foot forward next to the front and then passing forward with the latter; finally, the **lateral or circular step** is a sideways step taken with either foot to avoid or seek the straight line (e.g. Dall'Agocchie 14r, 14v).



Rule: while attacking and defending, the feet and the sword should move in synchrony.

Measure: defined by Viggiani (61r) it is the distance between me and the opponent from which I can strike him with a half-step or a pass.

The straight line (dritta via, retta linea in the 17th Century) is what we moderns understand as the line of offense (Anonymous, 24v). The more we are able to maintain ourselves in that line while shutting the opponent out of it, the more advantage we enjoy (Viggiani, 60v). This can be done by moving sideways, ensuring that the opponent's sword is out of our presence while ours is in his (Viggiani, 61r).

Putting it all together: the Dall'Agocchie solo form, "one of the most important things to practice in order to learn how to operate correctly sword-in-hand" (12r).

Starting with sword "sheathed," the feet together

1. Falso manco, riverso, right foot step forward, end in Coda Lunga
2. Falso dritto, mandritto, left foot pass forward, end in Porta di Ferro
3. Stramazzone, right foot pass forward, end in Porta di Ferro
4. Falso manco, riverso, left foot pass forward, end in Coda Lunga
5. Riverso ascendente, right foot pass forward, end in Alicorno
6. Imbroccata, no steps, end in Porta di Ferro
7. Falso manco, riverso, right foot pass back, end in Coda Lunga
8. Stramazzone, left foot pass back, end in Porta di Ferro
9. Stramazzone, right foot pass back, end in Porta di Ferro
10. Falso manco, riverso, left foot pass back, end in Coda Lunga

Re-sheathe the sword.

Lesson 5 Tempo

In this art, just as in skilled singing, the principal ability is knowing how to take tempi. (Anonymous, 20r.)
Knowing how to recognize and take tempi, as well as breaking the opponent's is an essential skill in Italian swordsmanship. To keep things simple, we will call tempo "the right moment in which to strike the opponent," leaving aside all the philosophical considerations I'm sure you have heard countless times (but which still apply!).

Dall'Agocchie's classification of five perfect instances to recognize a tempo in which to strike the opponent are what we will use in this class (please note the difference between "after" and "while":

1. After parrying the opponent's attack
2. After the opponent's attack has fallen harmlessly out of your presence
3. While he lifts his hand to strike you with a cut
4. While he changes guards (before he stops in the next)
5. While he lifts his foot, especially if it is to step forward

An action in **one tempo** is one where the parry and riposte are simultaneous or virtually simultaneous; an action in **two tempi** is one where the parry and riposte occur in two consecutive and well-distinct tempi. In practice, a full strike is said to take a **full tempo**, while a half-strike takes a **half-tempo**.

Lesson 6 Parries and ripostes

In gallant conversation, we rightfully prize a witty answer above the question that provoked it, since answering well requires considerable quickness of intellect. (Anonymous, 20v.)

All Bolognese Masters consider it the hallmark of the true swordsman to be able to parry and counter any strike from any guard. To **parry** (parare, riparare, schifare, etc.) simply means to defend against or to avert an attack; this can be done with the sword, a companion weapon or even with a void. **Riposting** (rispondere) means quite literally to answer to the opponent's attack with one of your own, either in the same tempo or immediately afterwards.

Thus, we have **one-tempo** parry-ripostes and **two-tempi** parry ripostes.

For the purpose of our class, we will concentrate on sword-parries, which will avail you not only in this discipline but also in any other sword-related art you practice and with whatever left-handed companion weapon you may be holding.

Sword-parries in the Bolognese school can be performed in the following manners:

1. **With the false edge**—i.e. by cutting a strong falso dritto or falso manco into the opponent's sword
2. **With the true edge**. These, in turn, can be subdivided into these categories (listing only the most common):
 - a. Half-mandritti or riversi—the mezza volta
 - b. The riverso ascendente (universal parry—please attend or observe Greg Mele's Viggiani class for this important action! We will not explore it here to avoid repetition.)
 - c. Guardia di Testa, Guardia di Faccia (more rarely Guardia d'Intrare)—for attacks to the head

Rule: Parries should be executed with the arm extended, so that they communicate more strength to the opponent's sword and they keep his sword farther from you. (Anonymous, 20v, Dall'Agocchie, 14v.)

Rule: When parrying, it is better to go forward rather than backward, so that you have a better opportunity to reach the opponent with the riposte and so that (in case of cuts) you meet the less harmful part of his sword. (Manciolino, 4r.)

Useful advice on defensive stepping: Use your body and your rear foot to turn your body towards the side of the parry (Dall'Agocchie, 14r). For instance, if you are in Porta di Ferro with your right foot forward and your right side is attacked, after passing forward with the left foot, accompany your parry by circling your right foot towards your left side, so that you help void the opponent's attack while also repositioning your body along a new straight line. In other words:

- If the attack comes to your right side, pass or step to your left, then circle back with your rear foot also towards your left until your feet end up in line with the opponent's body
- If the attack comes to your left side, pass or step to your right, then circle back with your rear foot also towards your right until your feet end up in line with the opponent's body



We will start by becoming comfortable with the false-edge parry as the most idiosyncratic to the style, then move on to the other forms of defense.

Lesson 7

The false-edge (or falso) parry, with riposte

Instruct your students to employ the false-edge parry more than any other, since it is the most useful form of defense. (Marozzo, Ch. 139).

Counting Marozzo and the telling statement above, the false-edge parry is the preferred mode of parry of three over five of the extant Bolognese Masters (also Manciolino, 5r and the Anonymous, 21r), who praise it for its strength and for the fact that cutting ripostes can often be delivered in the same tempo. Therefore, as “the most Bolognese of all Bolognese” parries, we will explore it first. We will start with parrying a thrust, which should be the “easiest to parry if you know what you are doing” (Anonymous, 11v).

Rule: As we have seen in the chapter on the sword, this parry is executed with the debole of the sword. To learn the false-edge parry to either side of the body, along with the riposte, we will simply use a “cell” of the Dall’Agocchie solo form and then expand on it.

Falso parry against a stoccata to your left, with riposte

Agent in Coda Lunga with either foot forward. Patient (performing the technique) in Coda Lunga e Stretta with the left foot forward. Patient: switch to Coda Lunga e Larga, at which the agent takes the tempo and delivers a stoccata with a pass. Patient:

1. Execute the falso-dritto parry while lifting your right foot for the oblique pass to the opponent’s left
 2. Hit the opponent with a mandritto to the head while your right foot lands on the ground
 3. Let your left foot follow behind the right, circle-wise, while setting yourself in Porta di Ferro with the right foot forward
- Redoubling: accompany step 3 with a stramazzone to the head

Falso parry against a stoccata to your right, with riposte

Agent in Coda Lunga with either foot forward; patient (performing the technique) in Porta di Ferro Stretta with the right foot forward. Patient: switch to Porta di Ferro Larga, at which the agent takes the tempo and delivers a stoccata with a pass. Patient:

1. Execute the falso-manco parry while lifting your left foot for the oblique pass to the opponent’s right
 2. Hit the opponent with a riverso to the head while your left foot lands on the ground
 3. Let your right foot follow behind the left, circle-wise, while setting yourself in Coda Lunga with the left foot forward
- Redoubling: accompany step 3 with a stramazzone to the head

Now, let’s add a little momentum in the agent’s attack: instead of the thrust, he will attempt to strike you with a mandritto and a riverso.

Falso parry against a mandritto, with riposte

Agent in Guardia Alta with either foot forward; patient (performing the technique) in Coda Lunga e Stretta with the left foot forward. Patient: switch to Coda Lunga e Larga, at which the agent takes the tempo and delivers the mandritto with a pass. Patient:

1. Execute the falso-dritto parry (false edge on true edge) while lifting your right foot for the oblique pass to the opponent’s left
 2. Hit the opponent with a mandritto to the head while your right foot lands on the ground
 3. Let your left foot follow behind the right, circle-wise, while setting yourself in Porta di Ferro with the right foot forward
- Redoubling: accompany step 3 with a stramazzone to the head

Falso parry against a riverso, with riposte

Agent in Guardia Alta with either foot forward; patient (performing the technique) in Porta di Ferro Stretta with the right foot forward. Patient: switch to Porta di Ferro Larga, at which the agent takes the tempo and delivers the riverso with a pass. Patient:

1. Execute the falso-manco parry (false edge on true edge) while lifting your left foot for the oblique pass to the opponent's right
 2. Hit the opponent with a riverso to the head while your left foot lands on the ground
 3. Let your right foot follow behind the left, circle-wise, while setting yourself in Coda Lunga with the left foot forward
- (Additional redoubling): accompany step 3 with a stramazzone to the head

So far, we have explored the parry executed in ideal situations, i.e. from the Larga version of the guard (thereby not requiring a preparation for the falso) and with the feet positioned for an oblique pass to the opposite side of the attack. Now, we will make things more realistic and learn the same parries from the Stretta version of the guards, and see how to use the half-step or accrescimento in lieu of the pass when called for. We will also add some zest to our compound riposte.

Falso parry from Coda Lunga e Stretta with the right foot forward against a mandritto, and compound riposte

Agent in Guardia Alta with either foot forward; patient in Porta di Ferro Stretta with the right foot forward. Patient: execute a mezza volta to Coda Lunga e Stretta, at which the agent takes the tempo and delivers a mandritto with a pass. Patient:

1. Quickly lower your point in preparation for the falso, without moving your feet
2. Execute the falso-dritto parry (false edge on true edge) while lifting your right foot for the half-step to the opponent's left
3. Hit the opponent with a mandritto while your right foot lands on the ground
4. Let your left foot follow behind the right, circle-wise while doing the following:
 1. Deliver a stoccata to the opponent's flank
 2. Deliver a stramazzone to the opponent's head

Falso parry from Porta di Ferro Stretta with the left foot forward against a riverso, and compound riposte

Agent in Guardia Alta with either foot forward; patient in Coda Lunga e Stretta with the right left foot forward. Patient: execute a mezza volta to Porta di Ferro Stretta, at which the agent takes the tempo and delivers a riverso with a pass. Patient:

1. Quickly lower your point in preparation for the falso, without moving your feet
2. Execute the falso-manco parry (false edge on true edge) while lifting your left foot for the half-step to the opponent's right
3. Hit the opponent with a riverso while your right foot lands on the ground
4. Let your left foot follow behind the right, circle-wise while doing the following:
 - Deliver a stoccata to the opponent's flank
 - Deliver a stramazzone to the opponent's head

Eye-candy: the abbellimento (embellishment)

Manciolino and Marozzo describe embellishments to be punctuated throughout a play. Besides their aesthetic purpose, these served as a logical separation between the play's units, as well as a way to break measure and recover in guard and in measure in a way that was both elegant and martial. The one we will learn is from Manciolino's first assalto (20v).

Starting from any guard:

- o. Lift a montante into Guardia Alta (unless you are already there), ensuring that you are with your right foot forward—if you are not, pass back with your left foot. This step may not be needed, depending on position.
1. Pass back with your right foot and cut a fendente into the right side of your buckler's rim, letting your sword-arm continue its path behind you through Coda Lunga e Distesa and back into Guardia Alta
2. Pass back with your left foot, striking the inside of your buckler's rim with your pommel
3. Pass forward with your left foot, setting yourself in Guardia di Testa
4. Pass forward with your right foot, hitting the boss of your buckler with a falso dritto
5. Draw your left foot near the right, setting yourself into Guardia Alta

The falso parry—putting it all together

In the following exercise, we will ensure that we have learned and internalized the falso parries along with their correct steps and riposte(s). If, as I hope, you are technically and stylistically confident in this exercise, congratulations: **you are no longer a beginner in the Bolognese style!**

Part 1

Agent: in Guardia Alta, may attack with a mandritto, a riverso or an imbroccata (as called).

Patient: from various low guards, recognizes the attack and executes the appropriate false-edge parry, along with its correct stepping and riposte (from simple to compound, as the exercise progresses).

Part 2 (alternating agent and patient)

As above, but patient ends action with abbellimento, becoming the agent for the next action.

Hint: try to always parry a mandritto with a falso dritto and a riverso with a falso manco. Bear this in mind while you prepare the parry (i.e. if you need to parry with a falso dritto from Porta di Ferro, prepare the cut by bringing your point momentarily into Coda Lunga e Larga).



Lesson 8

True-edge parries: the mezza volta and the Guardia di Testa

Performed in several ways, the mezza volta is one of the principal and most important actions in our discipline.
(Anonymous, 7v.)

Performing a **mezza volta** means turning the sword-hand so that the edge that was formerly facing left now faces right (Anonymous, 7v). The most common mezza volte are:

1. From Porta di Ferro Stretta to Coda Lunga e Stretta
2. From Coda Lunga e Stretta to Porta di Ferro Stretta
3. From Guardia di Faccia to Coda Lunga e Alta (a higher version of Coda Lunga e Stretta)
4. From Coda Lunga e Alta to Guardia di Faccia

Rule: when executing the mezza volta, the sword-point should remain directed at the opponent—ideally, it should not move at all (Anonymous, 24v). This way, the only part of the sword that moves is the defensive part of the sword, going left to right or right to left as the occasion requires.

One of the benefits of the mezza volta used defensively is the fact that it is a natural conduit for a thrust in the same tempo as the parry.

When executed forcefully, a mezza volta takes the form of a half-mandritto or half-riverso. In any case, the mezza volta only employs a half-tempo, and is therefore ideal to perform one-tempo parry-ripostes, especially with the counter-thrust.

We will learn how to parry to either side using the mezza volta with a simultaneous counter-thrust—a very Bolognese action that is extremely difficult for the opponent to counter, since it occurs in the same tempo as his attack.

Mezza volta and thrust to the chest against attacks to the left side (imbroccata and mandritto)

Patient starts in Porta di Ferro Stretta with the left foot forward, then switches to Coda Lunga as an invitation that will prompt the agent's action. Agent starts in Guardia Alta and, passing forward, unleashes an imbroccata to the chest (first few times) and then a mandritto. Patient:

1. Against the imbroccata: perform the mezza volta to Porta di Ferro, passing with the right foot to the opponent's left and pushing at the same time a thrust to his chest. End the action by letting your left foot circle behind the right.
2. Against the mandritto: as above, but with the sword in Guardia di Faccia

The mezza volta against attacks to the right side (imbroccata and riverso)

This is done as an exact mirror image of the action described just above. Patient starts in Coda Lunga e Stretta with the right foot forward, then switches to Porta di Ferro as an invitation that will prompt the agent's action. Agent starts in Guardia Alta and, passing forward, unleashes an imbroccata (first few times) and then a riverso. Patient:

1. Against the imbroccata: perform the mezza volta to Coda Lunga, passing with the left foot to the opponent's right and pushing at the same time a thrust to his chest, face or flank. End the action by letting your right foot circle behind the right.
2. Against the riverso: as above, but with the sword slightly higher (correct name of the guard is Guardia d'Intrare)

Note: the mezza volta is a good technique to employ against ascending cuts such as the mandritto or riverso ridoppio.

Parrying a fendente with the Guardia di Testa

One of the most stylistically-correct ways to parry a downward attack to the head such as a fendente is to employ the Guardia di Testa.

- Against a mandritto fendente, it is better to keep the sword-point low and towards the left, to pass or step to the opponent's left and to riposte with a mandritto
- Against a riverso fendente, it is better to keep the sword-point high towards the left, to pass or step to the opponent's right and to riposte with a riverso

Lesson 9 Voids against attacks to the leg

Attacks to the front leg are best foiled by pulling the leg back while simultaneously delivering a riposte in the form of a stramazzone or thrust to the head or a counter-cut to the sword-arm. An additional riposte can then be delivered by passing forward with the same foot or with the other.

The technically-correct ways to pull the leg back are several, the main ones being:

- Passing back
- Crossing the leg over the other, without letting the foot touch the ground
- Pulling the front foot near the back one
- Jumping back

Lesson 10 Being the agent (taking the initiative)

If you were to attack earnestly and without precautions while your opponent is motionless in his guard, you would put yourself at a great disadvantage, since he could counter your actions in many ways. (Dall'Agocchie, 24r.)

The passage above summarizes the Bolognese attitude towards taking the initiative:

Rule: Do not deliver an earnest attack out of tempo; rather, be sure you make the opponent move before delivering an earnest attack. The two most common ways to make the opponent move so that the earnest attack can be safely executed are:

1. The provocation
2. The feint

A **provocation** is just what the name suggests: an action designed to break the opponent's guard so that he either attacks—thereby giving you a tempo in which to perform the parry-ripostes we have seen, or is sufficiently disordered for you to safely carry home your offensive action. (Dall'Agocchie, 24r.) Also, a provocation should be designed to remove the opponent's point from your presence (Anonymous, 25r).

A **feint** is instead a simulated attack designed to make the opponent move as you desire.

• An attack delivered with the intent to strike, i.e. not a provocation or feint.

Depending on whether we are situated in a high guard or low guard, the provocations and feints are slightly different: as we know, the only technically-correct attacks from the low guards are the thrust and the falso (although the stramazzone is sometimes employed), while instead you have more latitude from the high guards, their role being first offensive then defensive.

We will explore a sample of the applications of the rules above, using both the low guards and the high guards.

Provocation 1: the falso

This provocation consists, essentially, of the same defensive “cell” from Dall’Agocchie’s solo form, only used offensively.

Example from Coda Lunga e Stretta with the left foot forward. Agent cuts a falso dritto into the opponent’s sword and, passing with the right foot to the opponent’s left, delivers a mandritto or a stramazzone to the patient’s head. Lastly, let the left foot follow behind the right.

Example from Porta di Ferro Stretta with the right foot forward. Agent cuts a falso manco in to the opponent’s sword and, passing with the left foot to the opponent’s right, delivers a riverso or a stramazzone to the patient’s head. Lastly, let the right foot follow behind the left.

Note on steps: in lieu of the pass, the gathering step may be used. In this case, the motion of the rear foot accompanies the falso, while the motion of the front foot coincides with the riposte. Even in this case, it is safest to end the action with the rear foot following behind the right.

Provocation 2: the mezza volta

This provocation, too, consists of the offensive use of the defensive actions we already saw. Only, instead of beating the opponent’s sword with a falso, you do so with the half-mandritto or half-riverso deriving from the mezza volta. As we know from the chapter on the mezza volta, the best attack following it is the thrust.

Example from Coda Lunga e Stretta with the left foot forward. Agent beats the opponent’s sword with a mezza volta into Porta di Ferro and, passing with the right foot to the opponent’s left, delivers a punta riversa to the patient’s chest, followed by a stramazzone to the head. Lastly, let the left foot follow behind the right.



Example from Porta di Ferro Stretta with the right foot forward. Agent cuts a falso manco in to the opponent’s sword and, passing with the left foot to the opponent’s right, delivers a thrust to the patient’s chest followed by a stramazzone to the head. Lastly, let the right foot follow behind the left.

Rule on feints: If you want to strike the opponent’s lower body, feint to his upper body and vice-versa (Manciolino, 4v).

Other rule: as we remember from Monte, the feinted strike (i.e. the one preceding the earnest one) should be realistic in intent but short, as should the step accompanying it; instead, the earnest attack and its accompanying step should be longer.

Advice on feints and high guards: Feints are a natural application of the high guards, because the opponent knows (or should know) that these are offensive first, then defensive—therefore, he will be expecting an attack. We will now try a few examples of feints from the high guards.

Feint 1: mandritto from Guardia Alta

Agent: Guardia Alta with the right foot forward. Patient: any guard.

- Agent feints a mandritto to the opponent's head, with (if necessary) a short half-step of the right foot
- Patient lifts his sword to parry (if he does not, the action should NOT continue!)
- Agent ensures that his sword is not touched and drops a riverso to the patient's leg, accompanied by a left-foot pass to the patient's right. Buckler serves as defense for the head

Note: ensure that your riverso to the leg occurs *in the tempo* of the opponent's lifting his sword—this is the safest way to execute this dynamic technique.

Feint 2: montante from Guardia Alta

Agent: Guardia Alta with the right foot forward. Patient: any guard (in this example we'll put him also in Guardia Alta).

- Agent feints a montante, with a pass to the opponent's right
- Patient attempts to parry by cutting down
- Agent parries patient's counter-cut in Guardia di Testa, then passes with the right foot to the opponent's left and delivers a mandritto to the opponent's head

Note: feint 2 (from Manciolino, 10v) is an excellent one to use from and against the English Broad Ward.

Feint 3: imbrogata from Alicorno with sfalsata (cavazione)

Agent: Alicorno with the right foot forward. Patient: any guard.

- Agent feints an imbrogata to the opponent's chest (between the opponents' sword and buckler), with no motion of the feet
- Patient attempts a true-edge parry
- Agent performs a sfalsata and strikes the opponent with a stoccata to the right flank, accompanied by a left-foot pass to the opponent's right

Feint 4 (double feint): imbrogata from Alicorno, riverso to the leg, ascending riverso to the sword-arm

Agent: Alicorno with the right foot forward. Patient: any guard (for this example, we'll place him in Porta di Ferro Stretta).

- Agent feints an imbrogata to the right side of the opponent's face, with no motion of the feet
- Patient attempts a true or false-edge parry
- Agent drops a riverso to the leg, accompanied by a left-foot pass
- Patient withdraws the leg and attempts a cut to the agent's head
- Agent passes back with the left foot and cuts an ascending riverso to the opponent's arm

Recapitulation and Post Scriptum

By now, you should know the following concepts and actions:

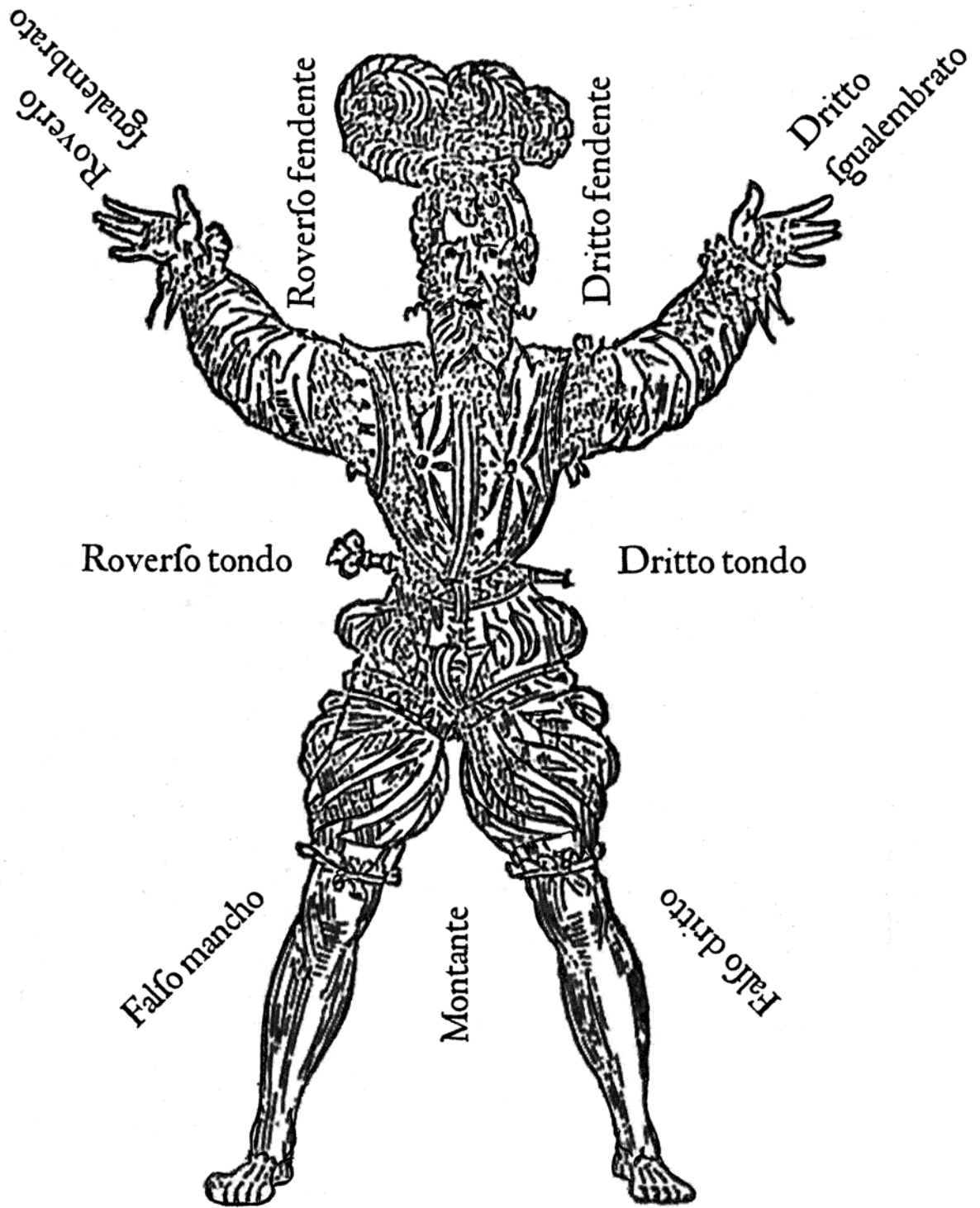
- The main guards
- The strikes from and to the main guards
- The essential steps (especially the oblique pass)
- The parries:
 - With the false edge, and their ripostes
 - With the true edge (mezza volta, Guardia di Testa) with their ripostes
 - The universal parry (from Greg Mele's class on Viggiani)
- Voiding with the front foot, especially against attacks to the leg
- The correct ways in which to take the initiative
 - The provocation
 - The feint

If you practice diligently all these actions and drills, you will be able to learn this style and eventually progress in it. Please do not add actions until you are thoroughly familiar with these—these will in fact carry you very far if you internalize them correctly.

I hope you have enjoyed this class. Thank you for your time and your enthusiasm!

VALETE





High Guards



Guardia Alta



Guardia di Faccia



Guardia di Testa



Guardia d'Alicorno

Low Guards

