

Employing Fiore's Longsword in SCA Rapier Combat

Marco Borromei

www.marco-borromei.com

Introduction

There are some who wish to use a longsword in SCA Rapier Combat; while it is neither the focal weapon of the masses fighting in this system nor the most efficient choice for a predominantly thrust oriented rule set, the longsword can be employed effectively there. This document is intended to distill techniques applicable within the SCA Rapier rules from **Fiore dei Liberi's Fior di Battaglia**, the masterpiece of the Italian longsword tradition, by way of **Brian R. Price's Sword in Two Hands**.



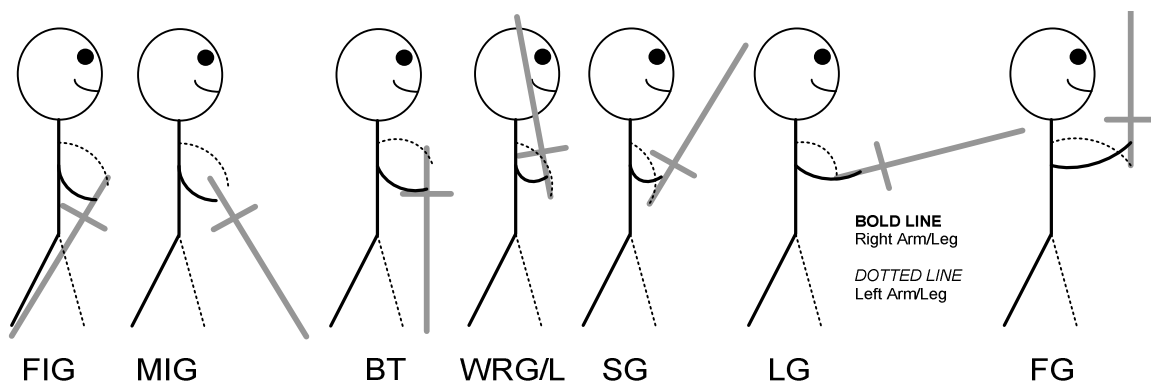
Studying **Sword in Two Hands** is essential for the student to progress beyond the stage of mimicking woodcuts [or, in this case, stick figures] and to begin understanding Fiore's system beyond the limited application provided here.

The focus of this paper is to discuss the **Scholar** armed with a longsword [two handed cutting and thrusting weapon] fighting against the **Fencer** armed with a rapier/small-sword [single handed thrusting weapon]. For discussion of a Scholar with a longsword versus another similarly armed, please refer to **Sword in Two Hands**.

Terms and Skills

We will discuss engagements using the common SCA fencing terms below. These are not quite the terms used by Fiore.

- Distances
 - Out of measure – OOM – one combatant cannot reach the other with any single step and thrust
 - Wide measure – WM – one can reach the other with a lunge or step/thrust combination
 - Narrow measure – NM – one can reach the other with only a thrust
 - Close measure – CM – one can reach the other with a bare hand to grapple
- Timing
 - Double tempo – DT – defense and counterattack in separate movements, *tic toc, tic toc...*
 - Single tempo – ST – defense and counterattack in the same movement/moment
 - Middle tempo – MT – defense, then counter attack in the middle of the opponents movement
- Footwork – Pass, Advance, Retreat, Compass
- Strikes – Thrust [point] and Draw Cut [lay the edge then pull with pressure... very *anti-Fiore*]
- Guards – we will use 8 of Fiore's 13 guards to oppose a Fencer, somewhat modified. For more detail on the guards [poste] please refer to **Sword in Two Hands**.
 - Full Iron Gate – **FIG** – lower body defense, right side
 - Middle Iron Gate – **MIG** – lower body defense, center
 - Boars Tooth – **BT** – lower body defense, left side
 - Woman's Guard Right/Left – **WGR & WGL** – modified from Fiore's original to conserve time; the hands grip the sword near the right or left shoulder with the point straight up instead of tilted down behind the back.
 - Short Guard – **SG** – the resting guard, drill transition from every other guard to here
 - Long Guard – **LG** – this is the thrust
 - Front Guard – **FG** – this is the closest guard used to transition to incidental body contact



Techniques

When studied and drilled, the above skills can be used to assemble specific techniques.

- Being Stable – Taking steps neither too long nor short to maintain balance, as well as keeping the sword on the trailing foot side of your body. Your hands are near your hips, not raised above shoulder level. This is good.
- Being Instable – Any foot position which is off balance or hand position which has your sword extended far from your hips such that you can reach no further. This is not good.
- Cover – Engaging or touching your opponent's blade in such a way that your sword is completely between his sword and you; you cannot be hit here.
- Scholar's Wide Measure – The distance at which at **Pass** and reaching into the **Long Guard** will touch an opponent. This is significantly shorter than the Fencer's lunge to Wide Measure.
- Attacking the Sword – The Scholar has less reach and possibly a shorter weapon than the Fencer, so will be in the Fencer's **Wide Measure** well before the Scholar can strike; thus the Scholar must attack the Fencer's weapon to clear a path to the Fencer.
- Limited Cuts – Where Fiore's cuts travel from one guard through the opponent to the next, in the SCA Rapier fight, the Scholar must take care to stop his cuts while the point is still near the opponent. Where Fiore's opponents were cutting back with hard pressure, the Fencer's lunge will not provide the same resistance. The Scholar's cuts against the Fencer's weapon are closer to strong beat parries than full cuts. Imagine performing these cuts in a narrow hallway: instead of the point arcing away from the opponent, it will hit a wall and still be somewhat angled towards the opponent.

Play-sets

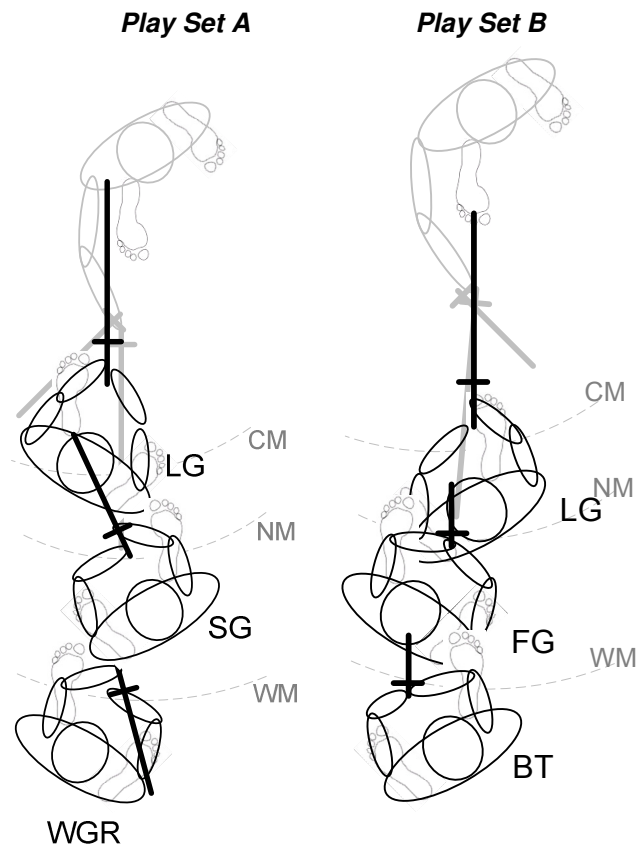
Here are two example play-sets where the **Scholar** with a Longsword faces the **Fencer** with a point-oriented Rapier.

Play-set A – Engage From Above/Right

1. Here the **Scholar** [in black] begins in the Woman's Guard Right, just outside the **Fencer's** [in gray] Wide Measure.
2. When F lunges, S responds with a Pass Step forward and a cut from WGR to the Short Guard, catching the point of F's rapier and parrying it slightly aside while crossing into the Narrow Measure safely.
3. Quickly, S continues forward with another Pass, crossing into the Close Measure, while extending into the Long Guard and striking F with a thrust.
4. If F retreats, S must continue forward with another Pass and maintain blade engagement.

Play-set B – Engage From Below/Left

5. Here the **Scholar** [in black] begins in the Boar' Tooth with his point near the ground, just outside the **Fencer's** [in gray] Wide Measure.
6. When F lunges, S responds with a Pass Step forward and a cut up from BT the Front guard Guard, catching the point of F's rapier and parrying it slightly aside and up while crossing into the Narrow Measure safely.
7. Quickly, S continues forward with another Pass, crossing into the Close Measure, while extending into the Long Guard and striking F with a thrust.
8. If F retreats, S must continue forward with another Pass and maintain blade engagement.



Conclusion... for now....

These are only 2 plays of the many that are possible when working within the point oriented SCA Rapier rules. While these rules limit some of the more dynamic responses with Fiore's system, a Stable and simple approach still applies. Focus on transitioning from one guard to the next and how that cutting movement can parry an incoming thrust. Choosing and drilling the more efficient combinations can yield a strong array of Longsword responses to thrusts and lunges. The next step involved adding a few more guards and skills, including blade grasping.

To Be Continued....