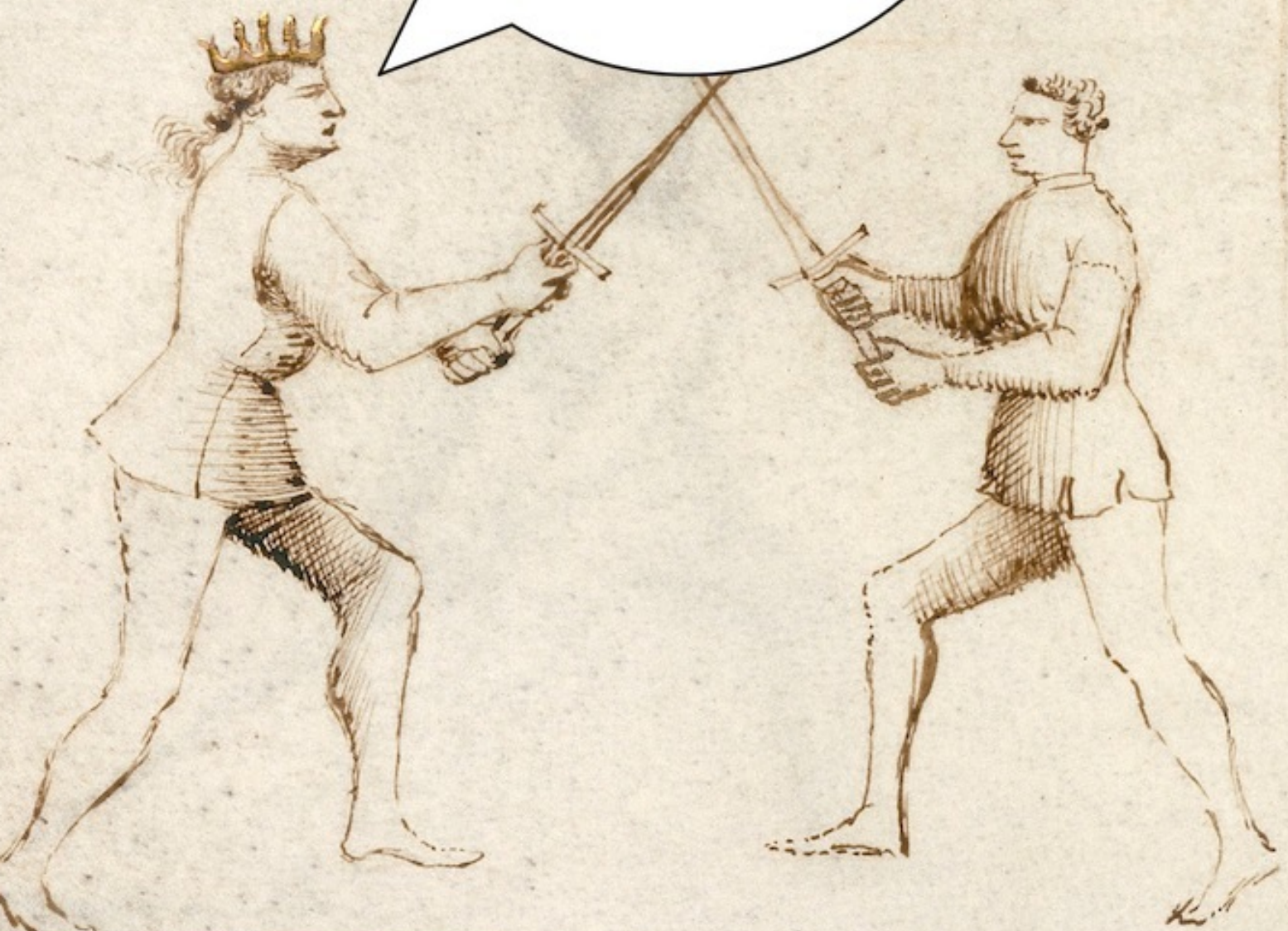


Inchora me incroso qui p zogho largo a
reza spada. Es subito che son incroso / io lasso dis-
porre la mia spada sopra le ser mane, e se uoglio
assare cū lo pe dritto fuora de strada, io gli posso
metter vna punta in lo petto / come qui dredo e
epento

What are you
doing, and why?
And how does Guy
know what I
should do about it?



Mastering the Art of Arms: One Play, One Drill: Many Questions

Guy Windsor
Helsinki, September 18th 2014.

Introduction

The Medieval Longsword is explicitly and deliberately a representation of my interpretation of Fiore's Art of Arms as regards the longsword used out of armour, arranged so that students can acquire it as a physical skill. It is not by any stretch of the imagination an academic argument in support of my interpretation. A fair-minded and thorough (though not entirely positive!) review, by Sean Manning, makes the point, and also highlighted for me that there are readers out there who are deeply interested in the research aspect.¹ So I thought I'd take one basic technical drill, and demonstrate in depth and detail *why* I do it this way. I chose for this the first two steps of "First Drill" from my basic syllabus, which is my take on the first and second plays of the master crossed at the middle of the swords in the *zogho largo*, shown here from f25v of the Getty ms:



The drill is very specific. Written out, it looks like this (quoting from [The Medieval Longsword](#), pages 97-98):

1. Attacker ready in right side *posta di donna*; you wait in *tutta porta di ferro*
2. Attacker strikes with *mandritto fendente*, aiming at your head
3. Parry with *frontale*, meeting the middle of the attacker's sword with the middle of your own, edge to flat
4. The attacker's sword is beaten wide to your left, so pass away from it (to your right), striking with a *mandritto fendente* to the attacker's left arm, and thrusting to the chest.

¹ See <http://bookandsword.com/2014/08/09/some-thoughts-on-guy-windsors-the-medieval-longsword/>

The answer to the question “why do you do it like that” must include answers to at least the following questions, and I’m sure you can think of more:

1. Why is there an attacker and defender?
2. Why would you wait in any guard?
3. Why would you wait in *tutta porta di ferro*?
4. Why is the attack coming from *posta di donna*?
5. Why is the attack a *mandritto fendente*?
6. Why is the defence a parry?
7. Why do you stand still to parry?
8. Why is the blade contact middle to middle?
9. Why is the blade contact edge-to-flat?
10. Why *frontale*?
11. Why is the attacker’s blade beaten away?
12. Why is the riposte a strike to the arm followed by a thrust to the chest?
13. Why is the *passo fora di strada* done to the right?

These are all fair questions, and to answer them, I will use direct quotes from the treatise wherever possible, and note any points where I have to rely on experience or other treatises. All page references are to the Getty manuscript unless otherwise noted.

Let’s start with the text on f25v: above the crowned master on the left, it says:

Anchora me incroso qui per zogho largo a meza spada. E subito che son incrosado io lasso discorrer la mia spada sopra le soi mane, e se voglio passare cum lo pe dritta fuora de strada, io gli posso metter una punta in lo petto, come qui dredo e depento.

My very literal translation reads:

Again, I am crossed here in the wide play at middle sword. And immediately that I am crossed I let my sword run off over the arms, and if I wish to pass with my right foot out of the way, I can place a thrust in the chest, as here below is depicted.

And above the play on the right, it reads:

Lo zogho del mio magistro io lo complido, cho io ofatta la sua coverta, e subito o fatto lo suo ditto, che io oferido primo gli brazzi, e poy glo posta la punta in petto.

Which I translate as:

The play of my master I have completed, so I have made his cover, and immediately done what he said, so I have struck first the arms, and then I put the thrust in the chest.

This begs the question, which one of the drawn figures is the “master”? We know it is the one wearing a crown because Fiore says as much in the introduction (f2r). It is worth quoting this at some length, as we will be coming back to this section later:

The guards, or "position," are easy to recognize. Some guards will be set against one another and will not touch one another, studying each other to see what the opponent may do. These are called poste, or guards, or First Masters of the fight. They will be wearing a crown, meaning that the position in which they wait is optimal for defense. These guards are also the foundation for carrying arms while in guard. A posta is the same as a guard. A guard (or posta) is what you use to defend or 'guard' yourself against the opponent's attacks. A posta (or guard) is a 'posture' against the opponent, which you use to injure him without danger to yourself.

The other Master following these four guards shows the plays that come from these guards and defends against an opponent who uses the actions deriving from the four guards. This Master, who also wears a crown, we call the Second Master or Remedy Master, since (by the rules of the art) he thwarts the attacks deriving from the poste or guards shown before,

This Second (or Remedy) Master has some students under him: these show the plays the Master or Remedy may perform after he executes the defense or grapple shown by the Remedy. These students wear an insignia below the knee. They execute all the plays of the Remedy until another Master appears who performs the counter to the Remedy and all of his students. And because he performs the counter to the Remedy and his students, this Master wears the uniform of the Remedy Master and that of his students, i.e. both the crown and the insignia below the knee. This king bears the name of Third Master or Counter, because he counters the other Masters and their plays.

(Leoni, Tom. *Fiore de' Liberi Fior di Battaglia Second English Edition*, p 5)

So, given that the scholar in our second pair of figures (“play”) is wearing a garter (an “insignia below the knee”), it is clear that the crowned figure is a remedy master, who is defending against the player. Thus, while it is obvious from the second play who is hitting whom, we can be equally sure that the crowned figure is the one defending in the first play.

It is also stated in the introduction that guards may be “positions in which [the masters] wait [that are] optimal for defense.”

1. Why is there an attacker and defender? and 2. Why would you wait in any guard?

So our first question, why is there an attacker and defender, can be answered along the lines of: because that is how the play is presented in the book. It seems that this is a defence done from a stationary guard, against an awaited attack.

Note that I am not suggesting that this is the only possible, useful, or common, set-up: we do all of these drills also from a moving starting point, but we can state with confidence that it is part of Fiore's Art to wait in guard for the attack. This also answers question 2, why would you wait in any guard: because Fiore says so. So, why *tutta porta di ferro*?

3. Why would you wait in *tutta porta di ferro*?

We know that the master has "covered", which term is used elsewhere quite explicitly to mean "parry", such as in the plays of the master of the sword in one hand. The text above the master reads (f20r): "*E in quello passare mi crovo rebattendo le spade*" "And in that pass I cross, beating the swords". On the next page, the text above his first scholar includes "*Quello che a ditto lo magistro io l'o ben fatto, zoe, ch'io passai fora de strada facendo bona coverta*" "That which the master has said I have done well, thus, I have passed out of the way making a good cover." Cover = parry seems reasonable.

We also know that the cover has been done from the right side, because of the way the swords are drawn. It is highly impractical to parry as shown, if you chamber the sword on your left. So we are looking for a guard with the sword chambered on the right, which would imply a left foot forwards stance, and one which can parry, and in which it is good to wait.

The text above *tutta porta di ferro* (f23v) reads:

Qui cominzano le guardie di spada a dox man. E sono xii guardie. La prima sie tutta porta di ferro che sta in grande forteza. Esi e bona daspetar ognarma manuale longa e curta. E pur chel habia bona spada non cura di troppa longeza. Ella passa cum coverta e va ale strette. E la scambi le punte e le soy ella mette. Anchora rebatte le punte a terra e sempre va cum passo e de ogni colpo ella fa coverta. E chi in quella gli da briga grand' deffese fa senza fadiga.

Here begin the guards of the sword in two hands. There are 12 guards. The first is the whole iron gate, that stands in great strength. And she is good to await every manual weapon, long and short, and for which it has a good sword, that is not too long. And she passes with a cover and goes to the close [plays]. She exchanges the thrust and places her own. She also beats the thrusts to the ground

and always goes with a pass and against all blows she makes a cover. And standing in this guard, one may easily make a defense against anyone who bothers him.

So, left foot forwards, “good to await every manual weapon”, “passes with the cover”, “against all blows she makes a cover” and “one may easily make defence”: this guard seems like a reasonable choice.

4. Why is the attack coming from *posta di donna*?

It appears to me from the image of the player that the attack is a descending blow from the right (*mandritto fendente*), done with a pass forwards, because the player is right foot forwards. Though Fiore never says so, it is generally accepted that longsword blows are usually struck with a passing step, from the side the blow comes. Experience shows that when cutting from the right, you can strike more easily if your right foot is forwards; and it is necessary to initiate the attack with the motion of the sword to prevent exposing yourself as you step forwards; this results in most *mandritto* attacks from one step out of measure being executed with the pass of the right foot. (This could use better supporting evidence; indeed a full and detailed academic study of cutting mechanics is long overdue. My next article project, perhaps.)

Whatever guard we chose should therefore be left foot forwards, to allow the passing step, and with the sword chambered on the right. *Posta di donna destra* is one such. The text above it reads:

Questa sie posta di donna che po fare tutti gli setti colpi de la spada. E de tutti colpi ella se po covrire. E rompe le altre guardie per grandi colpi che po fare. E per scambiar una punta ella e sempre presta. Lo pe che denanzi acresse fora di strada e quello di driedo passa ala traversa. E lo compagno fa remagner scoperto, e quello fe ferir subito per certo.

This is the woman's guard, that can make all seven blows of the sword. And she can cover against all blows. And she breaks the other guards with the great blows she can make. And she is always quick to exchange a thrust. The foot which is in front advances out of the way, and that which is behind passes across. And she makes the companion remain uncovered and can immediately strike him for certain.

So there is nothing there to suggest it would be a bad choice. And if we refer back to the introduction, “Some guards will be set against one another and will not touch one another, studying each other to see what the opponent may do.” It seems fitting to me to begin the paired longsword drills in our syllabus with one such pair: the first two guards of the sword in two hands.

5. Why is the attack a *mandritto fendente*?

Firstly, it is a very common and natural blow; an instinctive strike. Secondly, the image of the player has the sword approximately where it would be when a *mandritto fendente* is parried. He is right foot forwards, the swords are crossed clearly on the each others' left, and his point is high.

6. Why is the defence a parry?

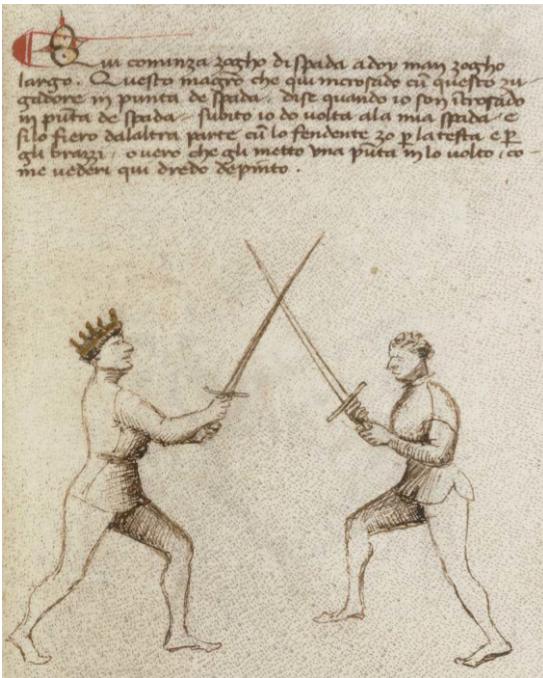
As we have seen: because the text above the scholar says it was ("*coverta*"). And because parrying is what most people naturally do when attacked.

7. Why do you stand still to parry?

In the first place, Fiore does not specify any footwork to be done during the parry. This is in contrast to other plays where footwork (such as an *accrescere fora di strada* and *passo ala traversa*) is specified during the defence, as it is in the *colpo di villano* (f26r), exchange of thrust and breaking the thrust (f26v), the plays of the sword in one hand (f20r-f21v), and the play of the sword from *dente di zenghiaro* or any other left side guard (f31r). Standing still fits with the "waiting" associated with our chosen guard and is academically supportable in the absence of any other data. However, there may be good reason to step back (and offline) while parrying, especially if put under time pressure by the attacker (stepping away buys more time to act). I discard the possibility of passing in with the left foot here because it makes no mechanical sense given the parry that is clearly shown from the right, and the measure as illustrated does not support it. As this drill is taught to beginners, it makes sense to start at least with the simplest possible set-up.

8. Why is the blade contact middle to middle?

The blade contact is middle to middle because the text explicitly refers to "*meza spada*", which we understand to mean about half way down the blade. This is in context with the previous master, crossed at the *punta di spada*, here:



The text states “Questo magistro che qui incrosado cum questo zugadore in punta de spada” “This master that is here crossed with this player at the point of the sword.”

Furthermore, we can refer to the Morgan MS, which describes three crossings of the sword:



Quista doi magista sono aq incrosadi a tuta spada. Ezoche po far uno po far l'altro zoe che po fare tuti zoghi de spada cham lo incrosar. Ma lo incrosar sia de tre rasone, Zoe a tuta spada e punta de spada. Echi e incrosado a tuta spada pocho gle po stare. Echi e mezo sado? a meza spada meno gle po stare. Echi a punta de spada niente gle po stare. Si che la spada si ha in si tre cose. zoe pocho, meno e niente.

These two masters are here crossed *a tuta spada*. And what one can do the other can do, thus they can do all the plays of the sword from the crossing. But the crossing is of three types, thus *a tuta spada* and at *punta de spada*. And the crossing *a tuta spada* little can it withstand. And *meza spada* less can it withstand. And *a punta de spada* nothing can it withstand. And so the sword has in it three things, thus: little, less and nothing.

Comparing these three images, it is incontrovertible that the reference “*meza spada*” here means “at the middle of the blades”.

In practical terms, we also find that with an open-hilted sword like a longsword, it is dangerous to parry close to the hands (for extra leverage), and to make the beating parry that Fiore describes (*rebattando*) the optimum balance between power and leverage, and the optimum place to aim for on the opponent’s weapon, is indeed the middle of each.

9. Why is the blade contact edge-to-flat?

It is obvious from the description that this parry is a blow of some sort, and it is clear from the illustration that it is done from the right, which means it can only reasonably be done with the true edge of the sword. The illustration clearly shows this, in my view. When striking at the opponent’s sword, it makes mechanical and practical sense to aim at his flat. This is because a) it is the weakest line of the sword itself b) it is unlikely to be supported by the opponent (see *Finding Bicorno* for details on this) and c) it reduces damage to your sword by spreading the contact over a larger surface than an edge-to-edge parry.

10. Why *frontale*?

When parrying up from a low guard, the blow you use is effectively a *mandritto sottano*. (A rising forehand blow.) This could be done with either edge, but for mechanical reasons I prefer the true edge. The natural ending point of a true-edge *sottano* aimed at the sword (as opposed to the opponent) is either a *fenestra* or *frontale* type position. For the argument regarding blows beginning and ending in guards, see both Angelo Viggiani’s *Lo Schermo*, and also Fiore’s statements on f23r regarding *fendenti* “*E ogni guardia che si fa terrena, Duna guardia in laltra andamo senza pena*” “And all guards that are made low, from one guard to the other we go easily”. Likewise, *sottani* can “*remanemo in posta longa*” “remain [i.e. end] in *posta longa*”. That Fiore provides us with the guard *frontale*, and says that “*per la incrosar ella e bona*” “she is good for crossing”, is a bonus.

Of course, if you are parrying from a high guard, then you would be parrying with a *fendente*, and will not arrive in *frontale*, so the instruction would change.

11. Why is the attacker's blade beaten away?

The instruction that immediately follows the parry is to let your sword run off over the opponent's arms. If his sword is still coming towards you, or indeed is stationary but close to your face, you just can't do that without getting hit. One of the functions of the parry, as we see from the text, is to leave the opponent "uncovered". If his sword is in the way, he is clearly covered. The treatise abounds with alternative actions after the parry, which deal with other contexts (such as the opponent's sword being grabbed); it seems clear that in this case, the sword has simply been beaten away by the parry as the defender intended. You see a similar situation in the second play of the sword in one hand, f20v.

This also goes to the definition of "*zogho largo*" as I understand the terms; for this please refer to *The Medieval Longsword* pages 43-45, and to my earliest stab at a definition, the article *Crossing Swords*, available here: <http://guywindsor.net/blog/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Crossing-Swords.pdf>

12. Why is the riposte a strike to the arm followed by a thrust to the chest?

Let's start with the text, which I'll repeat here to save you scanning back for it:

Above the crowned master it says:

Anchora me incroso qui per zogho largo a meza spada. E subito che son incrosado io lasso discorrer la mia spada sopra le soi mane, e se voglio passare cum lo pe dritta fuora de strada, io gli posso metter una punta in lo petto, come qui drede e depento.

Again, I am crossed here in the wide play at middle sword. And immediately that I am crossed I let my sword run off over the arms, and if I wish to pass with my right foot out of the way, I can place a thrust in the chest, as here below is depicted.

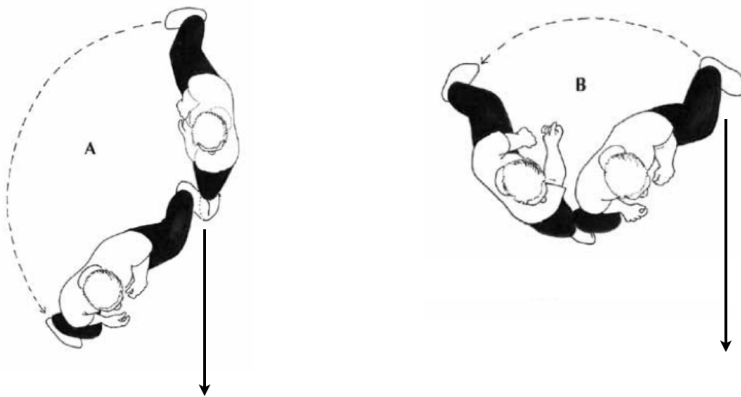
And above the play on the right, it reads:

Lo zogho del mio magistro io lo complido, cho io ofatta la sua coverta, e subito o fatto lo suo ditto, che io oferido primo gli brazzi, e poy glo posta la punta in petto.

Which I translate as: "The play of my master I have completed, so I have made his cover, and immediately done what he said, so I have struck first the arms, and then I put the thrust in the chest."

This makes the issue of where to riposte to pretty clear, I think. Timing it with the pass offline is less easy to justify according to the text, which clearly implies that the cut to the arms is done first,

without stepping, and the thrust to the chest is done afterwards, with the pass offline. The reason I do it together is a matter of both mechanics and practice. The pass of the right foot diagonally to the right (for why I do it to the right please see the next section) aligns me away from the opponent; it is the shift of the left foot behind me that brings me around to face him, as you can see from these images borrowed and adapted from *The Swordsman's Companion* (p. 64 in the first edition; p. 92 in the second). The solid arrow indicates the original line of direction. In practice, this first foot motion opens the line nicely for the blow to the arms, and the second aligns me for the thrust. It is arguably more correct to strike first, then time the thrust to the shift of the right foot, but it is much harder to teach that way to beginners.



13. Why is the *passo fora di strada* done to the right?

The pass out of the way can in theory be done in any direction. I do it to the right because it a) makes sense given the motion of the opponents sword to the left as I see it; b) it fits with the instruction to pass “out of the way” because I am literally getting out of the way of the attacker; c) I am also getting out of the way of the sword; d) it takes me to a place where I can reach with a strike, but my opponent has to step to strike; and e) by doing it this way I end up looking like the illustration.

The image could support the idea of a step done diagonally to the left, instead of to the right as I do it; but in my experience that would put me much closer to the opponent than is shown here.

And in Conclusion:

So, there we have it. Over 4,000 words written to support the interpretation that lies behind the basic execution of one drill in the book. I hope two things are clear from this:

1) In the training manual I set out to write, there just isn't room to provide support in this depth for every detail of interpretation.

2) I *can* support every aspect of every drill in this way. Feel free to ask me to do so. I don't have time to write one of these every week, but I stand by my interpretation and will back it up with evidence from the text at any time. If something in the book seems off to you, ask for the supporting evidence!

And please also bear in mind, that even with all this evidence, I may still be doing it wrong. That's historical swordsmanship for you.

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