

Achille Marozzo

A Brief Overview

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Introduction

Marozzo is one of the most famous sixteenth century fencing masters and is often considered to be “the greatest teacher of the old school, the rough and undisciplined swordsmanship of which depended as much on dash and violence and sudden inspiration as on carefully cultivated skill”. (Castle 35) Although he was Bolognese and not Italian he taught in Venice in the last 15th and early 16th Centuries. His manual was first published in 1536. He probably would not have written a book until his reputation was enough to warrant one so he most likely did not begin to write until later in life. However his reputation was great indeed because his book was published four more times before 1615. (Castle 35)

Stance

As with modern fencing, a student of Marozzo wants to present as small a target as possible with their upper body. The front foot is also pointed at the fighter’s opponent with the rear foot at a 60° to a 90° angle from the front foot. The feet and lower body are still spaced similarly to the modern stance with one interesting exception. Marozzo has his fighter’s move their heels out of line to add strength and steady the stance. (Fig. 1) (Rapisardi 2)

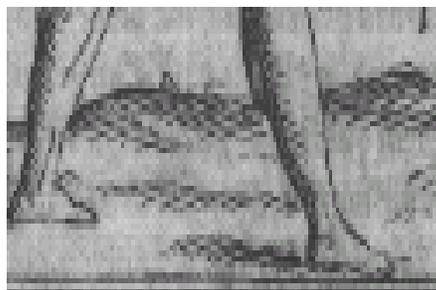


Fig 1: A woodcut from the *Arte dell' Armi* showing the position of the feet particularly clearly. (Marozzo 60)

Movement

Marozzo's footwork is made up of six basic movements. The first is the *passo*. This movement is similar to the modern advance and is executed by first moving the front foot forward and then the following it with the rear foot. It can also be executed backward by simply reversing the movement. The *gran passo* is a strong attacking motion executed by "throwing the leading foot forward and then returning" to the on guard position (Rapisardi 3). It is important to note that while this movement may sound similar to the lunge and may be a precursor it is not a lunge. The *raddoppio* is another linear movement and is designed to cover as much distance between you and your opponent as possible. Here the rear foot is brought close to the front foot while immediately moving the front foot forward. Marozzo's fighting technique often involves switching from a right foot forward stance to a left foot forward stance. The *passata* is used to make this switch and is executed by simply moving the rear foot forward of the front foot and rotating the body into the new on guard position. The *gran passata* is the same movement but with a larger execution to cover as much ground as possible. The *volte* is a lateral movement designed to move the body out of line of an attack. When executing this movement the rear foot is moved circularly around behind the front foot until the rear foot is in line with it (*demi volte*) or in front of it (*volte*). (Rapisardi 3)

There is also evidence of an "Italian Circle", similar to that of the Spanish, developing at this time. There were three main principals that governed the fight of the circle and three distances that fighters must also keep in mind when fighting.

The principle of expansion/contraction is that for all attacks you must expand out towards you opponent. Marozzo used the *gran passo* or great step when making the attack. Later masters such as Fabris taught the lunge. When defending you contract and close the line you are being attacked in.

The principle of angulation states that you will use [the] angle of blade to attack your opponent. Geometry is very important in the Italian system. Opposition is important when dealing with angulation. Opposition may be used on the attack or in defense to take you opponent's point away from you.

The principle of the hand and foot states that the hand and foot must finish movement at the same time on attacks. As the thrust or cut lands the moving foot must land at the same time.

(Wilson 1)

The three distances that fighters must keep in mind according to Marozzo are normal distance, close distance, and grappling distance. At normal distance (similar to SCA fighting's C range) the tip of your extended sword is at your opponent's guard. From this range you may attack close targets (i.e. hands, arms, etc) and defend. At close distance (similar to SCA fighting's B range) your guard meets you opponent's guard when your swords are extended. From here you may attack the deeper targets such as the chest and abdomen. You must also be very careful at this distance to defend your own deep targets as both fighters are vulnerable at this range. Grappling distance is the distance at which your hand is well inside you opponent's guard (similar to SCA

fighting's A range). This is the distance from which Marozzo teaches wrestling and grappling between fighters. (Wilson 1)

In theory a fighter would attack his opponent, moving from point A to point B along the diameter of the inner circle. His opponent in turn would move from point B to point C and attack the fighter at an angle at the same time his foot came to rest at point C. (Fig. 2, 3) (Siggs 6)



Fig 2: Two fighters using the Italian Circle as illustrated by Marozzo.
(Marozzo 76)

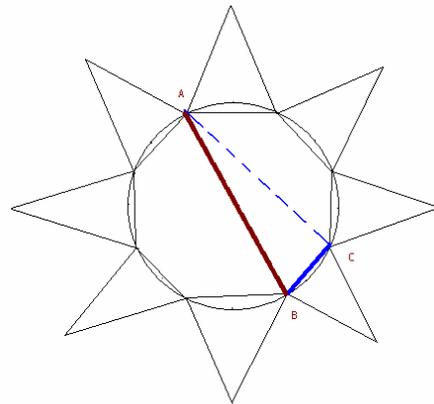


Fig 3: Movement in the Italian Circle.
(Siggs 6)

Timing, Velocity, and Measure: The Cornerstones of Good Fencing

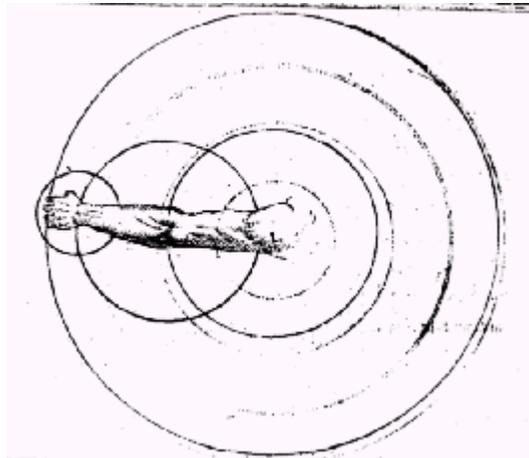
Timing, velocity, and measure are the foundations upon which all good fencing is built and for Marozzo they are crucial. Timing is necessary to evaluate and execute an action and tells a fighter when to act. Velocity is how fast a fighter can cover a specific amount of space and is used by a fighter to evaluate how to act. Measure tells a fighter how far away he must be to act, in other words where to act. For Marozzo there was the *gioco largo* (“large game”) and the *gioco stretto* (“close game”). A fighter is at the *gioco largo* when his blade is at the maximum distance from his opponent’s blades when they are still touching (foible to foible). A fighter is at the *gioco stretto* when he and his opponent are doing anything from fighting with their blades touching in the middle to grappling and wrestling. (Rapisardi 4)

Holding the Weapon

The sword favored by Marozzo and his contemporaries was a heavier weapon than the rapier that became popular in the later 16th Century as it was used nearly equally for both cutting and thrusting. There were no standard measurements as each weapon was designed for its owner. The style of the weapon was simple with a cross guard, a grip, and a pommel. According to Marozzo, the forte or “gradi” was to be used to parry, the middle portion or “medio” should be used to engage your opponent, and the foible or “debole” should be used to strike your opponent. A fighter should take care to hold his sword with his full hand under the grip and the index finger could be looped over the cross bar for added control. (Rapisardi 1-2) A fighter should also strive to cut with his wrist or, if need be, with the elbow too. (Rapisardi 2) By primarily using the wrist a fighter is able to keep his cuts quick. However, because of the nature of the joint, cuts generated with the wrist are not as strong as cuts generated with more of the arm. Thus, if a fighter needs to add more strength to his cut he should incorporate more of the arm into his attack and strive generate the cut from the elbow. This cut will not be as quick as one generated from the wrist but it will have more power. (Fig. 4)

Fig 4: Di Grassi’s Theory on the use of the arm for cuts, thrusts, etc. (Jackson 23-24) (image from Di Grassi 8)

1. The Wrist: The circle of the wrist is the smallest. Because of this, the wrist is the fastest part of the arm since it only has to fetch a very small compass to move.
2. The Elbow: The circle of the elbow is larger than that of the wrist. This larger circle gives the elbow more strength, but it also makes its movements slower.
3. The Shoulder: The circle of the shoulder is the largest of the three having a diameter of the whole arm. This gives the shoulder the most strength of any of the circles, but it also makes it the slowest too.



Guards

Marozzo discusses and uses numerous guards in this Treatise and for the most part they can be organized by families of similar wards. The wards directly described by Marozzo are the *Coda lunga e stretta*, the *Cinghiara porta di ferro*, the *Guardia alta*, the *Coda lunga e alta*, the *Porta di ferro stretta* and *Porta di ferro larga*, the *Coda lunga e distesa*, the *Guardia di testa*, the *Guardia di intrare*, the *Guardia di becca possa*, the *Guardia di facci*, and the *Guardia di becca cesa*. There also appear to be other wards mentioned by Marozzo but not directly described. However, thanks to Giovanni Rapisardi and his comparison of Marozzo’s guards with those of Manciolino and Dall’Agocchie we are able to obtain descriptions of all of Marozzo’s guards.

(Rapisardi 4-8) Again the fighter should try to stand with as low of a profile as possible with the feet slightly off line from one another. If a fighter is fighting with a buckler it should be held out towards his opponent (Fig. 1). Also keep in mind that Marozzo is writing for the right-handed fighter. Left-hand fighters should either fight right handed or reverse the positioning to fit a left-handed fighter.

1. **Coda longa e stretta**: The fighter should stand with his right foot forward and he should hold his sword outside his right knee with his wrist towards the ground (palm down) and pointed towards his opponent.
2. **Coda longa e alta**: This guard is framed exactly like the *Coda longa e stretta* but here the left foot is forward.
3. **Coda longa e larga**: This ward is framed again exactly like the *Coda longa e stretta* but here the fighter points his sword toward the ground. In this ward either the right or the left foot can be forward. (Fig. 6)
4. **Coda longa e distesa**: In this ward the fighter stands in the *Coda longa e larga* but rather than point his sword forward into the ground the fighter points the sword behind him. Just like with the *Coda longa e larga* either the right or the left foot can be forward.
5. **Porta di ferro stretta**: The fighter should stand with his right foot forward. The sword is held low over the fighter's right knee and pointed at his opponent.
6. **Porta di ferro larga**: The fighter stands in the same position as in the *Porta di ferro stretta* but with his sword held on his left side in a low four position.
7. **Porta di ferro alta**: Again the fighter should stand as he did in the *Porta di ferro stretta* but rather than holding his sword low over his right knee he should hold it straight out from his body.
8. **Cinghiara Porta di ferro stretta**: This ward is framed like the *Porta di ferro larga* but with the left foot forward.
9. **Cinghiara Porta di ferro larga**: This is the same ward as the *Porta di ferro stretta* but with the left foot forward.
10. **Cinghiara Porta di ferro alta**: Here the fighter stands as if he was in the *Porta di ferro alta* but with the left foot forward.
11. **Becca cesa**: This guard is very similar to Di Grassi's High ward. The sword is held high over the fighter's head and pointed down at his opponent's face or chest. Rapisardi illustrates it with the palm of the sword hand facing away from the fighter but it is probably held however is most comfortable. In the *Becca cesa* the fighter should stand with his right foot forward. (Fig. 6)
12. **Becca possa**: This is the same guard as the *Becca cesa* but the fighter should stand with his left foot forward. (Fig. 6)
13. **Guardia di sotto il braccio**: This ward and the *Guardia di sopra il braccio* appear to have been used most often with the buckler so they will be described with one. The fighter should stand with his right foot forward and his buckler held out straight at his opponent (see Fig 1 for buckler positioning). His sword arm should be held across his body and under his buckler arm with his sword pointing behind him.

14. **Guardia di sopra il braccio**: Again the fighter should stand as he did in the *Guardia di sotto il braccio* but rather hand holding his sword arm under his buckler arm it should be held across his body and over his buckler arm.
15. **Guardia alta**: In this guard a fighter can stand with either his right or left foot forward. Hi sword should be held as high as possible above his head and pointed straight towards the sky.
16. **Guardia di fianco**: This guard appears to have only been mentioned once by Marozzo to protect the left leg from a cut from your opponent invited by opening your left leg for the shot. The fighter appears to stand with is left leg forward and the guard is framed by holding your sword arm across your body with your sword pointing down and running almost parallel to your left leg. The sword hand is probably held palm out.
17. **Guardia di testa**: The sword is held out on the right side of the body. The tip is angled upwards and toward the left side of the body so as to protect the head and upper body from cuts on the right hand side. This guard is similar to the modern parry 5 primarily used in sabre fighting. (Fig. 5)
18. **Guardia di faccia**: Here the fighter stands with his right foot forward. The sword arm is out straight from the body with the palm up and the right edge of the sword pointing towards left side. (Fig. 6)
19. **Guardia di intrare**: This guard is the same as the *Guardia di faccia* with the minor change of pointing the palm down and the right edge of the blade to the right side. (Fig. 5)



Fig 5: The *Guardia di testa* (left) and the *Guardia di intrare* (right). (Marozzo 70)

It is important to remember that guards, or wards as they are also called, are not an active means of defense. By active we mean that they do not have any active defensive action. A guard is a position that protects the body from attacks by using body

placement, sword placement, and offhand weapon placement to cover target areas. Both defensive and offensive actions begin and end in guards but they are not themselves guards. Another common misconception is that guards are static and unchanging. Once you have selected a guard all your fighting is done from that guard. This is not the case. Guards are fluid and a fighter moves fluidly from one guard to another throughout his fight. For example, a fighter might begin his fight in the *Porta di ferro stretta* but from there he could transition into the *Cinghiara Porta di ferro stretta* or maybe the *Coda longa e larga* or the *Guardia di faccia*. It all depends on the fight and his opponent. Guards are not separate positions but rather they work together and are used by the fighter to protect his body as he transitions from one guard to another throughout the fight.



Fig 6: The *Guardia coda longa e larga* (top left), the *Guardia di becca possa* (top right), the *Guardia di faccia* (bottom left), and the *Guardia di becca cesa* (bottom right). (Marozzo 73)

Attacks

Marozzo's attacks consisted of both cuts and thrusts. Cuts could be made with the true edge of the blade, beginning from fighter's the right side, or the false edge of the blade, originating from the fighter's left side. True cuts were called 'mandritti'. The singular form "mandritto" was often shortened to "dritto". False cuts were termed "roversi" or "roverso" for one. Dritti cut right to left, from the fighter's perspective, cutting his opponent's left side. Similarly roversi cut from left to right cutting his opponent's right side. (Castle 36) All of the cuts were made with a simple cutting motion with the exception of the "tramazzone" which was made with a circular movement of the wrist that was used to strengthen the cut. (Fig. 7) (Rapisardi 9)

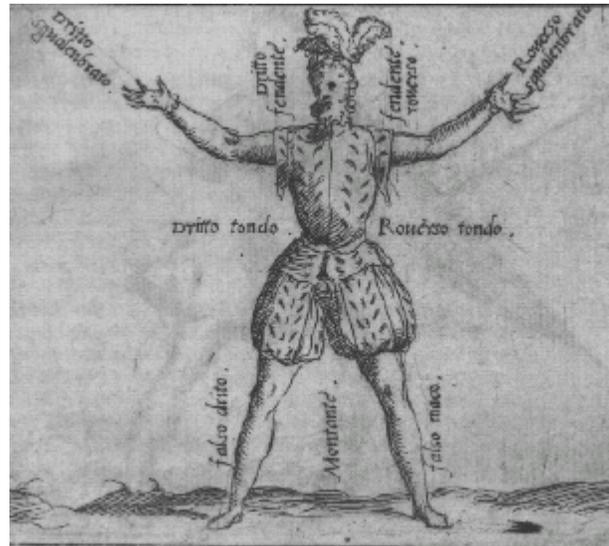


Fig 7: A man illustrating Marozzo's cuts as they would appear on one's opponent. (Marozzo 76)

However, Marozzo did not rely solely on the cut. Thrusts could also be used to attack one's opponent.

The thrusts [were] of four kind: the punta dritta (pl. "punte dritte") or just punta, executed with the hand in the Entering Guard's position; the punta roversa (pl. "punte rovere"), with the hand in the Face Guard's position; the imbroccata, (pl. "imbroccate") or overhand thrust, normally execute in the Becca Cesa or Possa's position; and the stoccata (pl. "stoccate") or underhand thrust, normally executed with the hand in [the] High Iron Door's position.

(Rapisardi 9)

When considering attacking, and before we move into defense, we should take care to keep in mind one of Marozzo's primary tenants. He felt very strongly that a fighter should never attack without defending and vice versa and that by both offending and defending at the same time a fighter would always be successful. (Marozzo Capitula 2)

Defense

While it does not appear that Marozzo specifically defines parries, he does not send his students out into the world unable to defend themselves. Marozzo's defense appears to mainly consist of either voiding the body offline of the attack, opposing an opponent's attack with an off hand weapon or one's own sword, or a combination of the two. Parries with one's sword appear to have been made mostly with the edge of the weapon rather than the flat. Marozzo's guards, while not parries, did help the fighter to defend himself by closing off lines of the body and warding off attacks from certain angles. (Castle 36)

Wrestling and Disarming

Although he is best known as a fencing master Marozzo taught much more than fencing. Marozzo and his contemporaries weren't just teaching fencing but the Art of Defense, which included all forms of fighting and weapons a fighting man could expect to come into contact with. His manual contains not only information about fencing but also fighting with pole weapons, the two handed sword, and wrestling and disarming and armed opponent when you yourself do not have a weapon. Below are descriptions of a few of his *presas* for disarming an armed opponent.



Fig 8: Here a fighter should first grasp the wrist his opponent's dagger hand. He should then grasp his opponent's shoulder and position his right leg behind his opponent's left leg. At this point he can use his opponent's lack of balance to push his over his leg. This probably works best with a rotation of the torso to bring one's opponent over and around your leg so that he is pushed to the ground. (Marozzo 187)



Fig 9: This *presa* is performed similarly to the previous *presa*, but instead of pushing your opponent over your right leg by pushing his shoulder you are grabbing his arm beneath where you have grasp his wrist and you are pulling him over your leg. As with the previous *presa* this one also probably works best with a torso rotation away from your opponent. (Marozzo 191)



Fig 10: Here you also want to grasp the wrist of your opponent's dagger hand with your right hand. You then want to pull his dagger wrist across your body and downward to your right side while bringing your left hand up to his elbow and pushing his elbow into the position shown. This is a particularly painful position for your opponent to be in and using just a little more forward pressure to his elbow you can move him pretty much where you want him. If he tries to fight back apply more forward pressure until he stops. (Marozzo 194)

Applications for SCA Rapier Combat

Due to his strong focus on cutting attacks, many of Marozzo's techniques are primarily applicable to new Cut and Thrust style of SCA rapier combat. However, while Marozzo's fighting style focuses heavily on these cutting attacks, there are still many applications for his theories in traditional thrust-based SCA rapier combat.

Marozzo's theories and techniques are very applicable to Cut and Thrust style SCA rapier combat. First of all the majority of Marozzo's wards are designed to protect the body from an incoming cut from an opponent and to position a fighter to return a cutting attack of his own. For example, in the *Guardia di testa* (Fig. 5) the sword is held out on the right side of the body. The tip is angled upwards and toward the left side of the body so as to protect the head and upper body from cuts on the right hand side. This ward also positions the fighter for a cut to his opponent's left side once he has gained control over his opponent's sword. Similarly, many of Marozzo's attacks are quite useful for Cut and Thrust style rapier combat. As we have mentioned earlier, Marozzo's attacks consisted of both cuts and thrusts while later practitioners of the art focused more heavily on thrusting attacks. As we discussed earlier, while cuts could be made with the true edge of the blade, beginning from fighter's the right side, or the false edge of the blade, originating from the fighter's left side, all of the cuts were made with a simple cutting motion with the exception of the "tramazzone" which was made with a wrist circle which cause the blade to circle which theoretically strengthen the cut. (Rapisardi 9) While this wrist movement, which is so crucial to Marozzo's cutting attacks, is not especially applicable to traditional thrust-based SCA rapier combat where percussive cuts are not allowed it is very applicable to Cut and Thrust style SCA rapier combat where percussive cuts are an essential part of the combat form and where it can be used, just as Marozzo used it, to add strength to an attack.

However, Marozzo's techniques and theories are not solely applicable to Cut and Thrust style SCA rapier combat. For instance, his ideas on movement are very relevant to traditional thrust-based SCA rapier combat. For example, the *demi volte*, which Marozzo uses to void the body out of line of an incoming attack, can be used for the same purpose in traditional SCA rapier combat. Personally, I have found this movement to be

extremely useful when paired with an off-hand or off-hand weapon parry of your opponent's sword away from your body as you execute the demi volte. Not only does this combination void your body out of the line off attack, it also parries and controls your opponent's weapon, changes your line of attack, and generally creates an opening in your opponent's defense, which you can exploit with an attack of your own.

In addition, some of Marozzo's theories can be applied to both styles of SCA rapier combat. His ideas on range, timing, and measure are the foundation on which many forms of combat are built. As we said earlier, timing is necessary to evaluate and execute an action and tells a fighter when to act, velocity is how fast a fighter can cover a specific amount of space and is used by a fighter to evaluate how to act, and measure tells a fighter how far away he must be to act or, in other words, where to act. These concepts are crucial to all forms of SCA rapier combat and understanding them benefits fighters tremendously. If these concepts are understood a fighter can use them to decide when is the most advantageous time for him to attack, change the tempo of the fight to gain control over his opponent, or determine whether or not his opponent would be able to attack him from his present position.

However, while many of Marozzo's techniques can be applied to one of the two forms of SCA rapier combat, some of them are prohibited from both. The *Arte of Defense* was, just as the name indicates, used for defending one's self, sometimes violently. During the time period bouts were fought with real swords. Even in practice, practitioners of the art used their personal weapons, bating the tip with a cork or similar object to provide some form of protection. Thus not all period techniques can be applied to SCA combat due to safety concerns. For example, Marozzo's *presas* are disarming moves that can be used to both protect yourself from an armed opponent if you are unarmed and remove your opponent's weapon. However, many of these movements create a great deal of force, which can be used to break bones. As an example, the *presa* depicted in Figure 10 can easily be used to break the arm or dislocate the elbow if necessary. However, these techniques are still a vital part of period rapier practices and should be studied, as they provide insight into the mindset of practitioners of the art in period, and are necessary for truly understanding the *Arte of Defense*. So, while they cannot be used in SCA rapier combat, they can still be studied through Historical Martial Arts classes, lectures, and workshops.

While not all of Marozzo's techniques can be used in SCA rapier combat many of them are still quite applicable to Cut and Thrust style rapier combat, traditional thrust-based rapier combat, or both.

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