

*Vincentio Saviolo:  
His Practice*

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*Introduction*

Vincentio Saviolo was an Italian fencing master teaching in London in the Black Friars district and was a contemporary of Geroge Silver, though neither man seems to have cared much for the other. Approximately 20 years after Giacomo di Grassi published his manual in Venice, Saviolo wrote his manual as a dialogue between Saviolo himself and a student named Luke where they discuss fencing theory and anecdotal wisdom during and between a series of drills and lessons.

*Glossary of Terms*

1. Imbrocatta: an attack over an opponent's weapon
2. Madritta: a cut made from the right to the left (also called "a dritta")
3. Stocatta: an attack under an opponent's weapon
4. Riversa: a cut from left to right
5. Stramazone: a slicing attack
6. Punta Riversa: a thrust attack made with the right hand that originates on a fighter's left side. (assumes a right handed fighter) It is a thrusting attack made in the same line as a riversa.
7. Passatta: a pace. Similar to Di Grassi's whole pace. Can be made forward or back.
8. Imbrocatta by Riversa: an imbrocata made in the riversa line. Similar to the punta riversa.
9. Incartata: a move similar to a volta or Di Grassi's circular pace.
10. Foyne: an Imbrocatta
11. Fendente: vertical cut down

*How to Hold a Blade*

When asked how the blade should be held, Saviolo replies that a fighter should stand comfortably and hold the blade however is most comfortable and easy for them. However, he does caution his student that under no circumstance should he hold the blade with his second finger in the hilt. According to Saviolo this method is too restrictive as it shortens the fighter's reach and restricts the movement of his arm. Rather he suggests placing the thumb on the hilt and the first finger toward the edge of the rapier.

## *Guards and Wards*

Single Sword:



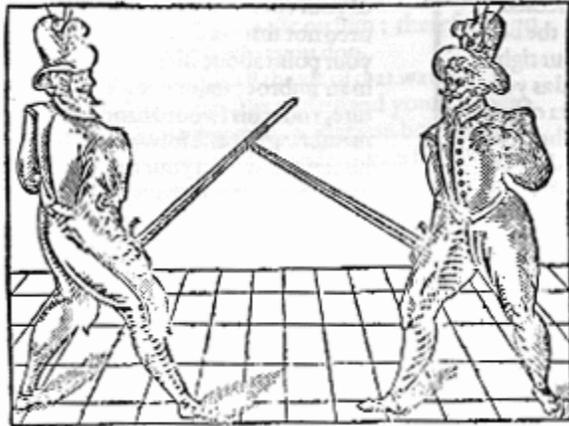
The First Ward: A basic stance used to give a student his first instruction.

The student should stand with his right foot first and with his knees somewhat bent, with the body resting more on the left leg than the right. This stance should be ready and nimble rather than firm and set so that the student has "spring" in his stance. From this stance the student can both strike and defend. The student should also be holding his sword down by his right knee. The sword arm should be relaxed and ready to move and the off hand should be held ready at the left breast.



The Second Ward:

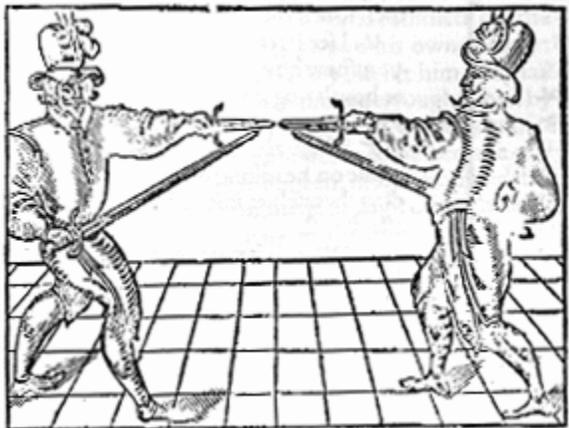
The ward is framed like the first ward except that the sword is held "helde in Shorte", closer to the body than in the first ward.



The Third Ward: The practical applications for this ward are rather complicated and confusing. Therefore, I am going to explain the ward but not go in to any real depth in this class as to how Saviolo uses it.

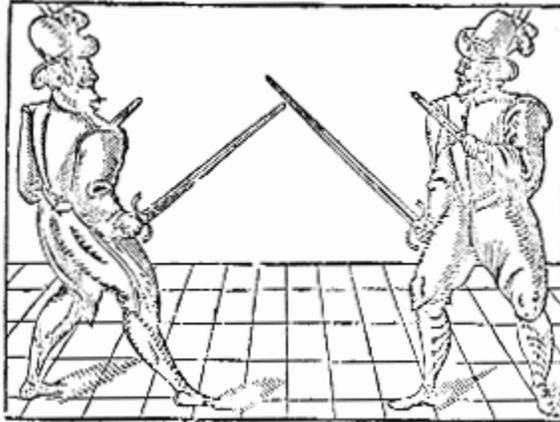
The student stands with his feet together and slightly bent as if he were ready to sit down. The rapier is held with in the knee and the point of his sword should be pointed at the face of his enemy.

Rapier and Dagger:



The First Ward: This is the first ward that Saviolo uses to teach rapier and dagger and is primarily the ward that this class will look at.

The student should hold his rapier in his right hand and his dagger in his left. The student should stand with his right foot first and with his knees somewhat bent, with the body resting more on the left leg than the right. This stance should be ready and nimble rather than firm and set so that the student has "spring" in his stance. He should hold his sword "drawn in short", close to the hip with his torso in more of a refused stance while holding his dagger out at length.



The Second Ward: This ward corresponds to Ward Three for single rapier and once again the practical applications for this ward are rather complicated and confusing. Therefore, I am going to explain the ward but not go in to any real depth in this class as to how Saviolo uses it.

The student should stand with his feet even and his legs slightly bent as if he were beginning to sit down. He should hold his rapier in his right hand, which should be held near his right knee. He should hold his dagger in his left hand, which should be held out towards his opponent.



The Third Ward: "L. ....were it that a man were to combate, and through brevite of time it were not possible to be perfect in the depth of his knowledge, what order would you take, to instruct him that he might be safe and dangerles. V. .... I would acquaint him with one only warde, which amongst all other is the best for fight, to him who will understand it: of which I meane now to entreate, to the end I may enstruct you in it, that being throughly practised in that onely warde, you maye combate securely."

The student should stand with his left foot forward and his right foot behind. He should hold his dagger extended in his left hand and his rapier in his right hand short and close to his body.

### *Time and Measure*

*"L. Are there many sortes of times?"*

*V. Many are of divers opinions in that pointe, some hold that there are foure times, other five, and some six, and for mine own parte, I thinke there are many times not requisite to be spoken of...."*

Time and measure are two principles that have been crucial to fencing since the first swords were raised. Saviolo does not go into detail defining these two terms, rather he chooses to teach his pupil the meaning of these terms through drill. Time, or timing, is the amount of time it takes an individual to complete a given movement. Some movements take less time than others depending on body position, potential attacks from one's opponent, ect. For example, most of the time, the thrust has a timing advantage over the cut because it can be executed in less time. However, this is not always the case. If your point is offline, pointed above your opponent's head for example) then the cut has the advantage because it takes less time. In this situation you can execute the cut from your current position rather than having to draw you sword back to get your point on line to execute your thrust. The term "measure" is synomous with distance. Here and advantage can be gained by positioning yourself so that you are closer to your opponent that he is to you. Such and advantage is greatly desired because it means that from your position you are able to attack your opponent while he is out of range to attack you.

According to Saviolo, if you find that you have gained an advantage of time over your opponent and he attacks you with a stoccata, then you should thrust at him with a stoccata of your own. However, if he attacks you with an imbrocatta then you should thrust at his face with a stocatta while moving to your right with a half incartata. If he thrusts at your legs you should you should move your legs circularly to avoid his thrust and make a stoccata to his face.

If your opponent attacks with a mandritta you should thrust a stoccatta at his face. Since the thrust takes less time than the cut the would have to void backwards to avoid being killed by your attack and if he doesn't you will wound his facc, where most wounds are deadly and even the smallest wound is disableing since blood can easily get in his eyes and ruin his ability to see.

### *Using cuts during combat*

Saviolo cautions his students about the use of cuts in combat. He states that he would not advise anyone fighting for their lives to use cuts (madrittis, riversas) in combat because they take more time and are not as quick and easy to preform as the thrust is. However, he uses them in the drills and teaches them to his students because they do have their uses and there are times when you will want to use a cut rather than a thrust. Also, cuts are taught by other fencing masters, some of who prefer the cut to the thrust and Saviolo wants his students to be prepared to fight against them.

### *Hand Parries and Wearing a Mail Glove*

According to Saviolo, it is preferable, in most cases, to parry an attack with your hand and risk injuring your off hand than to parry the attack with your sword. By using the hand to parry you can easily gain full control of your opponent's blade without giving him any advantage over your own blade. By parrying with the sword you run the risk of

losing the point of your sword by having it come off line. To protect the hand Saviolo recommends wearing a mail gauntlet or glove. The mail will protect your hand from the cuts and enable you to grab hold of your opponent's blade and thus gain control.

### *Drills for the Master and Student*

All drills are preformed with the master and student facing each other in ward. Their swords appear to be held flat to flat, according to the woodcuts, crossing in the middle of the swords. Their weapons are pointed at each other's face and their front feet are in line with each other.

#### Drill 1 (Single Rapier 1<sup>st</sup> Ward):

##### **Master** (moves first)

1) Standing in the first ward move the right foot circularly to the right. Move your point under the student's rapier and execute a thrust to his belly.

2) Beat S.'s blade to your right with your left hand away from your body. Move your right foot behind your left

while making a reverse cut at S.'s head.

3) Move forward and while S. moves backward, parry his imbrogatta outward from the left side. Move your left foot behind your right and execute a madritta at S. head.

3) Yield and beat the stocatta away from the left side. Bring your right foot circularly to the right and thrust an imbrogatta to S.'s face.

5) Move back and to your right with your right foot (towards S. left). Break his imbrogatta away from your

##### **Student**

1) Moving in the same tempo move your right foot to your right following it with the left foot taking care to keep your right foot pointed at M. Turn your body on your right side and thrust a stocatta at M.'s belly. Your hand should be turned with you fingers in towards your body and your wrist out.

2) Move forward with your left foot right foot, turn your hand and thrust an imbrogatta under M.'s rapier while lifting up your hand with your thrust to guard your body with your blade. Block M.'s blade with your left hand, but don't parry it aside

3) Move right with your right foot following with your left. Turn your rapier hand so that your point is at M.'s belly. Raise your left hand to protect your face and thrust at M.'s belly with a stocatta.

4) Step back and to the right with your right foot. Beat M.'s imbrogatta with your left hand to away from you left side and thrust an imbrogatta to M.'s face.

5) Turn the point of your foot toward M. and left the middle part of the left foot directly respect the heel of the right and

left side with your left hand and strike a downward right blow to S.'s head which should be unguarded after the imbrocatta.

6) Beat the stocatta away from the right side of the body and remove with your right foot (behind the left foot) and stike a riversa at S.'s head.

turn your body to the right. Thrust a stocatta at M.'s belly and DO NOT MOVE FORWARD. (If you do you might come inside the arch of the cut.)

Drill 2 (Single Rapier 2<sup>nd</sup> Ward-For learning to give the Stocatta):

**Master** (moves first)

1) Make a stocatta to S., moving aside somewhat w/ your right leg and following with the left leg circularly toward the left side of S. (Gives advantage in distance if you wish to take it)

2) Move your right leg following it with your left leg toward S.'s left hand while parrying S.'s stocatta with your left hand and striking with an imbrocatta to S.'s face.

3) Moving your right foot again toward S.'s left hand, parry the imbrocatta with your left hand and thrust a stocatta to S.'s belly.

4) Fall back slightly, parrying the stocatta outward toward the right side. Move your right foot backwards and to your left and strike with a punta riversa to S.'s head.

5) Move your right leg and strike with a stocatta straight to the head as in the first ward.

**Student**

1) Move your right leg in counter time just as M. did. Parry his stocatta with your left and while attacking with a stocatta to M.'s belly.

2) Move your right foot toward M.'s left side circularly, beating his thrust with your left hand toward your left side. attack with an imbrocatta to M.'s face.

3) Move in countertime with your right foot toward M.'s left hand. Parry his stocatta downward with your left hand and attack with another stocatta.

4) Step forward with your left leg, turn your point quickly to M.'s belly and bring up your left hand to protect your face.

Most of the attacks used in this drill are stocattas and imbrocattas. In his manual, Saviolo explains that he uses this drill to teach time and measure, coordination of the feet, hands, and body, and how to give execute these particular attacks correctly. He favors

using these attacks for this drill because they are useful for teaching new students time, measure, and coordination as they are easy to learn and execute.

### Drill 3 (Rapier and Dagger 1<sup>st</sup> Ward)

#### **Master** (moves first)

- 1) Execute a stocatta to S.'s belly under his dagger while moving your right foot a little to S.'s left side.
- 2) Parry the stocatta with your dagger, move a little aside toward S.'s left hand and strike with an imbrocatta above his dagger.
- 3) Parry the attack outward to the left side and answer with a stocatta to S.'s belly under his dagger while moving circularly with your right foot toward S.'s left side.
- 4) Move your body to protect your face while parrying the point of S.'s blade to your right side. Strike with a riversa to S.'s head and step back with your right foot.

#### **Student**

- 1) Parry the blow downward with your dagger toward your left side and strike at M.'s belly with a stocatta beneath his dagger.
- 2) Parry the imbrocatta upward with your dagger and moving circularly with your right foot toward M.'s left side thrust an imbrocatta above his dagger.
- 3) While parrying the stocatta outward to the left answer his attack with a stocatta of your own, stepping with your right foot towards M.'s left.
- 4) Move your left foot forward to where M.'s right foot was. Holding your dagger high and straight, turn your sword so that it is pointed at M.'s belly and take the riversa on your sword and dagger.

During this drill Luke asks Saviolo why he doesn't hold his dagger point up like many other teachers do to when they defend against a riversa? Saviolo answers that he doesn't hold his dagger point up because if you do then you run the risk of being struck in the belly, face, or on the head. You are also open to an attack with a stramozone between your rapier and dagger because the weapons are not closed.

Luke also goes on to ask why Saviolo does not parry thrusts inward towards his right side? Saviolo states that you should parry all stocattas and imbrocattas outward to your left. However, imbrocattas by a riversa should be parried inward toward your right side with a little step back to avoid being struck.

### Drill 4 (Rapier and Dagger 3rd Ward)

#### **Master**

- 1) Pass circularly to S.'s left side with your right foot and thrust a stocatta at S.'s face or breast

#### **Student (moves first)**

- 1) Move towards M.'s left side

2) Parry the thrust with your dagger to the left side, turning the point either high or low depending on the thrust. Move backwards by carrying your right foot towards S.'s left side and thrust an imbrocatta above S.'s dagger.

3) Retire aside and stike with a dritta (madritta), or riversa, or imbrocatta with the dritta.

2) While M. thrusts a stocatta and passes to your left side, pass circularly to M.'s left side and thrust a stocatta at his breast or face, winding your body to the left.

3) Move your right foot toward M.'s left and parry his imbrocatta outwards from the left side and thrust an imbrocatta above M.'s dagger.

Saviolo goes on to give Luke some practice advice on using this ward in combat. For example, if you and your opponent both choose this ward, you should take care to note whether or not he holds his body and his weapons high or low and you should choose your attacks based on the answer. If he is high, you may keep your point under his dagger hand and thrust a stocatta to his breast. If he is low you could choose to thrust an imbrocatta at his belly or face taking care to move your right foot towards your opponent's left side and while voiding your body from a possible attack.

Drill 5 (Fighting a Left Handed Combatant with Rapier and Dagger: Use Rapier and Dagger Ward 1)

**Master** (moves first)

1) Carry your body in ward (right foot forward) hold your sword in close to your body and your dagger extended out) to your left and attack with a stocatta under S.'s rapier and bearing your right foot toward your body, turn circularly upon your right side

2) Void your body and parry the imbrocatta with the dagger away from your left side. carry your right foot towards S.'s left and give an imbrocatta under his dagger.

3) Beat the stocatta away from your left side with your dagger. Move your right foot circularly towards your left and give another stocatta under the dagger.

4) Void your body out of line and parry the imbrocatta out on the right side moving your right foot and at the

**Student**

1) (Standing with left foot forward) turn the point of your dagger down and parry the stocatta away from your left side. Pass your left foot toward M.'s left side and strike with an imbrocatta under his dagger.

2) Turn the dagger point up and parry the imbrocatta from your left side. Move your left foot circularly toward M.'s left and give a stocatta to the face over his dagger.

3) Beat the attack away as before with your dagger. Move aside with your left foot towards M.'s left and give an imbrocatta under the dagger.

4) Move your right foot where M.'s right foot was and give a stocatta to the belly. Receive the riversa on your rapier and

same time and carrying the left foot after the right, give a riversa to the head.

dagger. (A right handed man will will pass with the left foot and give an imbrocatta, which is opposite.)

### *Fighting a left handed fighter*

Saviolo begins his discussion of fighting lefties by explicitly stating that the left-hand fighter has no innate advantage over the right-handed fighter. Advantage is only gained through practice and skill and knowledge of the art. Fighting a left-hand fighter however, is different than fighting a right handed fighter and you will have to treat them differently in your fighting. Because of this it is important to practice against left handed fighters so that you are prepared when you come up against one for real.

When fighting a left handed fighter, Saviolo suggests that you first assess his ward and how he holds his weapons. You should then attack in the same ward with your weapons in the same position as your opponent's weapons. He is not saying that if you are fighting a left handed fighter that you should fight with your sword in your left hand. Rather, for example if your opponent is in the first ward of rapier and dagger, you should also stand in the first ward of rapier and dagger rather than standing in the second.

Saviolo also cautions against attacking a left handed fighter's dagger side if he is in ward with his left foot first because when he is in this ward he is presenting his sword forward in his left hand and keeping his dagger back towards his body in his right hand. If you attack his right side while he is in this ward you run the danger of being attacked by him because you have to attack much deeper to hit your target than he does because you are much closer to his sword than his dagger is to you. At this point he can easily strike you with an imbrocatta. If he attacks you with an imbrocatta, void with your body, beat his sword away from your left side and attack his with an imbrocatta or a stocatta. If you must attack a left handed fighter first; you should opt to attack his left side. With your sword on the outside of his, attack him with a stocatta to the face. Retreat with your left foot and follow it quickly with your right.

If the left handed fighter holds his sword out at length when he stands in his ward, Saviolo suggests standing in the 3<sup>rd</sup> ward, carrying yourself as a left handed fighter with your left arm and left leg leading. In this ward, if you charge his left side you can easily gain control of his weapons.

### *How to defend against a charging enemy: (advice given for a fighter in dagger ward three)*

According to Saviolo, if you find that your enemy has charged you and gained an advantage over you, you should put yourself into a sure guard and retreat a little making sure to keep your feet in your guard. If you move your body of dagger up your enemy might attack. When he does you should void your body to either your right or your left depending on the angle in which he attacks and strike back anywhere he might be open.

If he attacks you with a stocatta after he has gained an advantage over you, you should parry his attack by turning your dagger point down and attack him with a stocatta, imbrocatta, or punta riversa. However, if he attacks with an imbrocatta above your dagger you should parry his attack by lifting the point of your dagger up while turning the wrist of your dagger hand to the left. This motion will parry his attack away from you left side leaving you free to attack with a thrust to any of opening he might present. Another possibility if he attacks with an imbrocatta is to void your body back slightly and beat his attack away from you right side. At that point you should attack him with a punta riversa to his face or body.

If your enemy comes running at you, remain in your ward and when he is close enough attack him with a simple thrust. The more determinedly he is running at you the more dangerous your attack is for him because he is neither in ward nor standing firmly on the ground. He will not be able to stop easily and will run upon your blade.

### *Tall man attacking little man: (advice given for a fighter in dagger ward three)*

Saviolo also believed that this ward could be beneficial to a tall man who seeks to attack a shorter man. If the taller fighter is not careful in his stance, and he charges the shorter fighter and attacks him in range, he runs the risk of losing his point. If this occurs, the shorter fighter can easily strike the taller man with a stocatta or passatta. However, if the taller fighter chooses to use this ward when fighting a short opponent, he could easily use his height to his advantage by attacking his opponent with a stocatta and retiring his body a little.

### *Why is this Important and Insights into the Manual*

One of the advantages of Saviolo's manual is that he includes a large number of drills, which he uses to instruct his student. Many of these drills can still be used for instruction.

Most of his practice is more applicable to schlager than epee. Schlager and Del Tin blades are a closer approximation to the swords used in period than epees are and thus it is easier to get the timing of the movements work with them.

One difficulty is that the woodcuts Saviolo uses are difficult to use to interpret foot positioning because for the most part all of the guards appear to have the same foot placement regardless of Saviolo's description (ex. Single Rapier wards 1,2, & 3). However, the woodcuts do correspond well to the wards even if they appear to illustrate a guard slightly different than the one Saviolo describes and where there was a question, I chose to rely on the description given rather than the woodcut.

Saviolo also use a lot of anecdotes to explain theory, ect. to his student Luke which is a rather interesting approach and certainly different than Di Grassi simple explanations. Many of these anecdotes involve duels and his second book, *Of Honor and Honorable Quarrels* discusses at length how duels should be fought, why they should be fought, and how they are arranged.

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