The Curious Case of the Forward Target in Rapier and Small Sword

JBT Emmons
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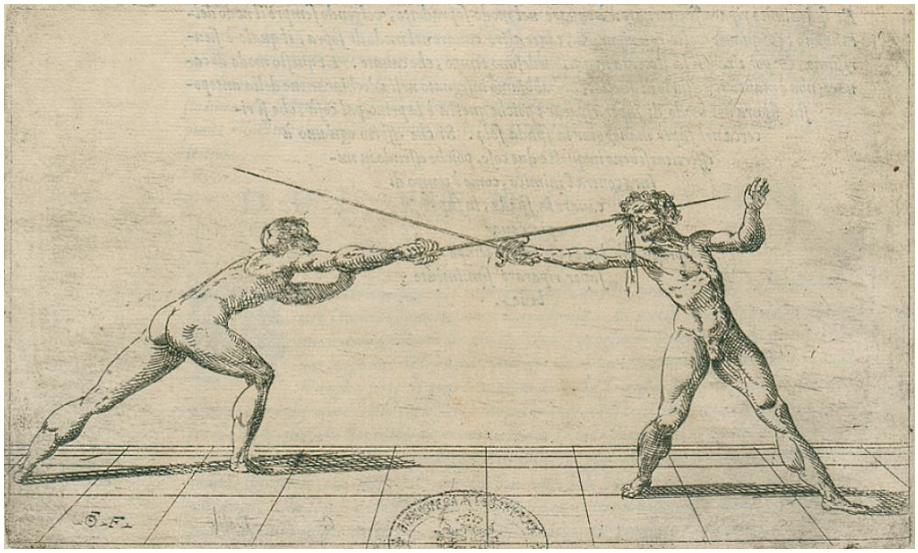
A quick look at most any rapier or small sword treatise and one will notice the emphasis placed on thrusts to the deep target. For rapier, that often includes—in wonderfully grisly fashion—thrusts to the face as well as torso. What one does *not* see as much is attention to the forward target, that is, the arm, hand, and in some contexts the front leg.[1] Given the near universal focus on drilling the thrust in the sources, and considering the high degree of point-control one develops in such practice, as more recent fencing demonstrates, it is easy to wonder why we see so little inclusion of the advanced target in these earlier works. Even when a master, say Domenico Angelo, discusses the *arrest* in tempo it is not clear if he includes the arm or not.[2]



Nicolo Giganti, The School, 1606, fig. 6

This is a portion of an ongoing study, a way to raise a few of the issues for discussion, and to explore a few of the salient points pertaining to the question.[3] The curious case of the forward target showcases a number of historical and historiographical challenges. We have the nature of

[1] The question of the hand and arm as target arose in the course of teaching both rapier and small sword. Given the extended guards in so many of the treatises, a fact that my colleague Carlo Parisi has also noted (https://youtu.be/7vCVMGHz54c), the relative closeness of the hand to one's blade, and the fact one can make thrusts with opposition to the arm just as one does in modern epee all argued for the inclusion of the forward target.

[2] Domenico Angelo, *The School of Fencing*, London: 1787, 69-70.

[3] My thanks to Patrick Bratton, Mike Cherba, Christopher Holzman, Michael Kňažko, Sean Mueller, and Alex Spreier for their suggestions of sources, corrections, and proofreading. I would also like to thank Reinier van Noort for his corrections on my transliteration of Von Witzleben.

the weapons and especially their complex hilts. We have what is stated and not stated in the treatises, anecdotal information from accounts of duels, incidental comments that can be illuminating, and what logically follows from the techniques for using these weapons. What I attempt here is a literary version of random sampling common in archaeology.[4] Starting with a few sources I know well, I have looked at a few others from other parts of Europe, and from different times, to see what if any pattern emerges.

The sample, at present, suggests what one might expect, though something far from explicit in the extant tracts: the forward target was not a primary goal in rapier or small sword fencing, but an acceptable target should would land a touch there, and in some cases, a favored target should one not wish to kill one's adversary. I focus on the evidence for inclusion of the forward target, not on the vast majority of works that do *not* mention it; this is partly for brevity, but partly because a short discussion covering these examples, which are rarely found together in one place, might be of value to other instructors and scholars of fencing.

Rapier and Small Sword Guards

The complex hilts on rapiers and the shell on small swords both do a fantastic job of protecting one so long as one's structure and technique are sound. Complex hilts, on the face of it, argue an obvious concern for how vulnerable the hand is. Most general histories covering rapier are quick to point out the various bars, cups, and rings that comprise the guard and how these were "improvements" on the cross-guard of the archetypical medieval sword. One can, and should, argue against any idea of linear progress in the development of hilt design—people have historically been adept when it comes to arming themselves. They use what they need, and given how long the cross-hilt was in use, we have to conclude it did the job well for the context in which it was used.[5] This is the critical point. Body armor, shields, bucklers, and the nature of warfare do much to explain the longevity of the cross-hilt.

However, changes in warfare, and important in this context, non-military use of weapons (e.g. self-defense), not to mention cultural developments like the duel, meant adapting weapons and systems.[6] The rapier, and its offspring, the small sword, were excellent responses to the needs of

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[4] This is a method meant to assess the nature of a site by randomly chosen test pits. It is not perfect, but the more one is able to test, or in this case, read, the better the data; for a valuable discussion, see https://www.digitwithraven.com/single-post/archaeological-sampling-techniques#:~:text=Simple%20Random%20Sampling%3A%20This%20is,a%20table%20of%20random%20numbers. See also William S. Dancey, *Archaeological Field Methods: An Introduction*, Edina, MN: Alpha Editions, 1981, esp. 45-51, 128-135; Brian Fagan, *Archaeology: A Brief Introduction*, 4th ed., New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1991, 98-101, 113-116; David Hurst Thomas, *Archaeology*, 2nd ed., Fort Worth, TX: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.,1990, 236-237, 431-438.

[5] Context is everything. Many swords used into the modern period, from the Georgian *khmali* to the *takouba* common in much of North Africa, boasted simple cross-guards and suited their needs well.

[6] There are a number of works which explore the complex cultural changes around the duel. See especially, François Billacois, *The Duel: Its Rise and Fall in Early Modern France*, ed. and trans. Trista

anyone fighting one-on-one in civilian contexts. The blade of the average rapier was long and sharp, a first deterrent against any would-be on-rusher, but should the sharp point not prevent someone from attacking or should an opponent's blade have reached past it, then there was the guard and its bits to deflect, block, or trap the incoming steel. Small sword, in a similar way, though less long, was fast and as sharp. It is easy, perhaps, to dismiss the diminutive, often pretty small sword as more fashion accessory than side-arm, but this reflects our own bias. We are at a disadvantage. We no longer fight our battles, national or personal, with swords, and so are removed from the context when this was normal. Moreover, our surviving sword-related pursuits, with few exceptions, not only conform to rules but are conducted within the confines of a necessary safety culture. If we hurt our colleagues, we have no one to play with, and in some instances may find ourselves in court.

One question is whether these complex hilts were designed to protect the hand because it was *itself* a target, or, if the guard was there to protect the hand as one reached for *deeper* target. It is a fine distinction, but could explain or form part of the explanation for why we see so little attention devoted to the hand and forearm in the sources. Style and fashion must, in some degree, explain hilt forms as well, but it is difficult to conclude that anyone would chose form over function if there was the remotest chance they might have to use the weapon, so while style plays a role it was secondary to considerations of proper use and one's safety.[7] Few masters made a point to explain this, but it seems sound to reason that complex hilts no doubt were meant both to protect the hand itself and to provide some cover to the hand and forearm as incidental targets as one lunged for the torso or face. We have some evidence for this in Sir William Hope's *A New, Short, and Easy Method of Fencing*. Hope adopted a hanging guard over what he calls the "medium guard," or a guard held more or less out from the body, arm extended, weapon directed at the opponent (more or less modern *terza/sixte* which close off the outside line). Hope believed that his position better protected the hand regardless of weapon.[8] Of note, he specifies the danger to the sword hand:

> I will only ask them this Question, How they would defend themselves, either a *Rapier, Shearing-sword, or Sabre*? none of which have close *Hilts*, and yet are the *Swords* now a-days most commonly made use of, not only for walking about the Streets, but the two last

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Selous, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990; Pascal Brioist, et al., *Crosier le fer: Violence et culture de l'épée dans la France moderne* (XVI°-XVIII° Siècle),Seyssel, FR: Champ Vallon, 2002; still valuable, but dated is V.G. Kiernan's *The Duel in European History: Honour and the Reign of the Aristocracy*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1989.

[7] This is an obvious generalization as the evidence, much of it incidental, suggests that many who wore swords as part of normal, everyday dress did not know how to use them. See for example J.D. Aylward, *The Small-Sword in England*, London, UK: Hutchinson & Co., 1960, 106; Richard Cohen, *By the Sword*, New York, NY: Random House, 2002, 198-200.

[8] There were several editions of this work. I'm using the second, printed in 1714, though the pagination is the same for the 1707 edition. Hope's warning about the hand can be found on pages 77-78, *A New, Short, and Easy Method of Fencing*, Edinburgh, SCT: James Watson, 1714.

> also in time of War, in a Battle; they certainly could not answer me, that they would defend themselves with the common Parades, which they usually draw from the *Hanging* and *Medium-Guards*; because, if they did attempt to do it once, they would perhaps scarcely have a Finger wherewith to hold their Sword, against the second or third *Blow* their Adversary would discharge against them; if smartly delivered, and planted with a true Edge: So much is their *Sword-hand,* in making use of such a false *Parade,* exposed to the Adversary's Weapon.[9]

Hope goes on to say that his hanging guard removes some of these dangers, but that the parry of quarte/fourth, so long as a good "cross" is made, can work too. The problem, as he saw it, was that people generally parried poorly, thus so many doubled or became victims of *contre-temps*.[10]

Without meaning to raise the specter of linear progress, it is worth noting that guard design in rapier witnessed what is easily one of the best ways to protect the hand, the cup-hilt, late in the weapon's tenure. While there are a number of conclusions one might make about this, it is likely no accident that rapier guards improved hand protection over time. A skilled fencer may have been adept at protecting the hand in a "swept-hilt" guard, but not everyone was a skilled fencer. The attraction of a cup of steel enclosing the hand is immediately obvious. Significantly, the cup-hilt and its descendants, such as the dish-hilt, decreased in size as small sword became the civilian weapon of choice. Perhaps the larger guard was considered a hindrance on a lighter, faster weapon, perhaps it was just a nuisance to wear on one's hip, but the development of small complex guards did not mean the end of earlier hilt types. In other contexts we see many of the same designs that had been used since at least the Middle Ages.

Most medieval swords, even those of the roughly contemporary Bolognese School, generally boasted minimal guards, at least in comparison to fully-developed rapier hilts. Moreover, and important here, the evidence for sword systems predating rapier included the forward target. Surviving sources, from tracts on fighting to myriad images found in medieval art, make this clear. Body armor and shields, naturally, explain less need for a complex guard, but it does not follow that the adoption of a new sword, the rapier, should immediately mean discarding any attention to the forward target. If swordplay of the Middle Ages and "Renaissance" included the extended target, and if 19th century fencing did, then it seems more likely that the hand and arm as valid target did not disappear for two-hundred years only to appear again, suddenly, with the more recent *arrest*. This is, however, a premise we can test through sampling the literature.

Medieval & Renaissance Fencing and the Hand

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[9] Ibid, 77. The italics are Hope's. Note too that "rapier" in this instance refers to small sword; see A.V. B. Norman, *The Rapier and Small-Sword 1460-1820*. Reprint. Kent Trotman, Publishing, 2019, 27. Hereafter, Norman, *Rapier and Small-Sword*.
[10] Ibid, 78-79.

Many medieval treatises include the forward target. Fiore dei Liberi's (ca. 1410) system, *armizare*, included it. In his description of *Posta di Ferro Mezana* (*stabile*), Fiore says

> *Questa e mezzana porta di ferro per che sta in mezo. & e una forte guardia, ma ella vole longa spada. Ella butta forte punte, e rebatte per forza le spade in erto, e torna cum lo fendente per la testa o per gli brazzi, e pur torna in sua guardia. Pero ven chiamata porta per che la e forte ed e forte guardia che male se po rompere semza periculo e venire a le strette.*
>
> This is Porta di Ferro Mezana (Middle Iron Gate), since it holds the sword in the middle. It is a good guard, but calls for a long blade. This guard delivers strong thrusts, forcefully beats swords away low-to-high, then comes back down with a *fendente* to the head or arms, recovering in the same guard. It is called "gate" because it is strong; it is a strong guard that is difficult to break without danger and without coming to the close.[11]

In similar fashion, one of the target options from *Dente di Cinghiaro*, "Boar's Tooth," is the arms:

> *Questo si e dente di zengiaro pero che dello zengia ro prende lo modo di ferire. Ello tra grandi punte per sotto man in fin al volto e no si move di passo, e torna cum lo fendente zo per gli brazzi. E alchuna volta tra la punta al volto, e va cum la punta erta, e in quello zitar di punta ello acresse lo pe ch'e dinanzi subito, e torna cum lo fendente per la testa e per gli brazzi e torna in sua guardia, e subito zitta un altra punta cum acresser di pe, e ben se defende de lo zogho stretto.*
>
> This is Dente di Cinghiaro (the Boar's Tooth), since it learned its offenses from the boar. It can deliver strong underhand thrusts all the way to the opponent's face without stepping; it then comes back down with a *fendente* to the arms. Sometimes, it can deliver a thrust to the opponent's face, point up, while performing a quick *accrescimento* with the front foot, and recover back in guard with a *fendente* to the head and arms; then, it immediately delivers another thrust with the front-foot *accrescimento*. It defends well against close play.[12]

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[11] Fiore dei Liberi, *Fior di Battaglia* (MS Ludwig XV 13, J. Paul Getty Museum), ca. 1404; 24r-b, "Longsword Stances Part I," accessed via Pocket Armizare from Northwest Armizare, Sherwood, OR, http://www.nwarmizare.com/Pocket-Fiore/assets/www/index.html ; I checked the public transcription against the most up to date treatment on Fiore's works, in this case the first volume of *Flowers of Battle: The Complete Works of Fiore dei Liberi, Vol. 1 The Getty Manuscript and Historical Context*, ed. Greg Mele and Tom Leoni, Wheaton, IL: Freelance Academy Press, 2017, 24r/p. 260 for *Porta di Ferro Mezzano* and *Dente de Chinghiaro*.

[12] Ibid., 24r-d. Of note, the arms remain an option from other posta as well, including *Posta Frontale/Posta di Corona* and *Posta di Chinghiaro Mezzana*; for stretto or close play, the 5th scholar

Fiore, who had spent a lifetime fighting as well as many years teaching, included the arms as targets whether one was in long or short play for the sword. Lest his example, which we have several extant works to demonstrate, appear unique, his contemporaries north of the Alps also included the forward target in their systems.

The *Krumphau* or "crooked stroke" in German works such as the "*Die Zettel*" or "The Recital" of Johannes Liechtenauer (14th cen.), for example, mentions striking the hands:

> *Krump auff behende*
> *wirff dein ort auff dye hende*
> *krump wer wol setzt ~*
> *[4v] ·M·it schriten vil haw letzt*
>
> Crooked on him with nimbleness,
> throw the point on the hands,
> Who performs well the crooked well,
> with stepping he hinders many a stroke.[13]

Similar advice accompanies the *Schilhaw* or "Squinting Stroke:"

> *Schiler ain pricht*
> *was püffel slecht oder sticht*
> *wer wechsel drawt*
> *schiler dar aus Inn beraubt*
> *Schil kürtzt er dich an*
> *Durch wechsel gesigt im an*
> *Schill zw dem ort*
> *vnd nym den hals ane vorcht*
> *Schill zw° dem öberñ*
> *haubt hend wild du bedöberñ*
>
> The Squinter breaks into
> whatever a buffalo strikes or thrusts,
> Who threatens to change through,
> the Squinter robs him of it.
> Squint when he is short against you,
> changing through defeats him.
> Squint to the point,

makes mention of injuring the arms; in addition, the *ligadura*, which bind limbs can be used to submission or as ways to break limbs.

[13] Johannes Liechtenauer, "Die Zettel/The Recital," ll. 42-44, trans. Christian Tobler, Wiktenauer.com, https://wiktenauer.com/wiki/Johannes_Liechtenauer#Long_Sword accessed 03/20/2023.

and take the throat without fear.
Squint to the head above
if you want to damage the hands.[14]

We also see graphic images of fighters severing the hands of opponents in the works of Hans Talhoffer, a 15th century master, such as this example where a sword takes the wrist;[15]

MS Thott. 290.2° 079v

and in *The Württemberg Treatise* where a similar strike is made with a Messer:[16]

[14] Ibid., ll. 58-63.

[15] Hans Talhoffer, *Personal Manuscript* (MS Thott. 290.2°), 1459, also includes graphic images of hands being hacked in folio 122v and 123r.

[16] Hans Talhoffer, *The Württemberg Treatise* (Cod. icon. 394a), 1467, features attacks to the arm with longsword, cf. 6r (forearm), 9r (shoulder), 9v (forearm), 12r (wrists), and 23v (hand/glove).

Württemberg Treatise (1467), Cod. icon. 394a 115v

This attention to the limbs did not end in 1500 CE, but continued as evidenced well by the so-called Bolognese School.

This tradition survives in a collection of texts with one foot in the Middle Ages and the other in the "Renaissance." Filippo Dardi (d. 1464) is the first known master in Bologna and is believed to have influenced the masters most closely associated with that tradition, men such as Antonio Manciolino, Achille Marozzo, and Giovanni dall'Agocchie. Unlike rapier treatises, the earliest of which are contemporaneous with some of the Bolognese masters, those from this Bolognese style still include fighting in armor and pole arms, topics far less common in rapier works, but typical of many medieval ones. However, much of the technique used in so-called "side-sword" fencing anticipated, influenced, or shared much in common with rapier. This is to say while these masters emphasized the cut, there are many thrusts included as well.[17]

To name just one, representative example, Antonio Manciolino early on his treatise, *Opera Nova*, remarks that one might throw a *mandritto* (descending blow from the right assuming a right-hander) at the opponent's hand:

> *Percio che ponendo per caso che tu & il nemico siate in guardia alta, & che tu sii l'offendente tu puoi tirare di mandritto per la sua mano della spada, che uadi sopra braccio, & tornare di riuerso pur per quella mano.*

[17] Both Achille Marozzo and Antonio Manciolino, for example, include thrusts among their feints, blows, and ripostes from various guards and parries. Cf., for Marozzo, Book II, Ch. 39, 45, 50, 66-70, 72, 75, among other instances in Achille Marozzo, *Opera Nova*, 1536, trans. William Wilson, Wiktenauer.com, https://wiktenauer.com/wiki/Achille_Marozzo#Second_Book_.28Single_Dagger.2C_Single_Sword.2C_Sword_with_Weapons.29 , accessed 03/28/2023.

> Accordingly, posing the case that you and your enemy are in guardia alta, and that you are the attacker, you can throw a mandritto at his sword hand which will go over your arm, and then turn a riverso also to that hand.[18]

Book One of *Opera Nova*, which covers sword and buckler, includes many references to the hand as target, not only for cuts, but thrusts as well.[19]

> *Ma sel tirasse di riuerso, tu gli uolgerai una punta per la mano in compagnia del Brocchero, & sel tirasse di fendente, tu andando con la spada in guardia di testa quello riparerai.*
>
> But if he throws a riverso, you will turn him a thrust to the hand in the company of the buckler, and if he throws a fendente, you will parry that by going with your sword into guardia di testa.[20]

Several of the Bolognese masters were contemporary with our earliest rapier masters. Camillo Agrippa, for example, published his *Trattato di Scientia d'Arme* in 1553, in the middle of the period covered by Achille Marozzo's *Opera Nova* published in 1536 and Giovanni dall'Agocchie, who published his work on the sword, *Dell'Arte di Scrima Libri Tre*, in 1572. It is important to remember that periods overlap, that previous ones influence others but do not necessarily spark immediate, drastic change. The inclusion of cuts, returning to the topic here, for example, in rapier texts even into the late 17th century is a case in point. The various *taglia* in Bolognese manuals and rapier treatises are just one aspect of fencing that these systems share in common.[21] The major difference between Bolognese works and those for rapier is context; the former might be used one on one, indeed much of the material focuses on two combatants, but had battle-field, melee applications too. The first *assault* of Marozzo, for example, suggests not only a duel between two people, but also, like many modern kata in East Asian martial arts, a combat including multiple opponents.

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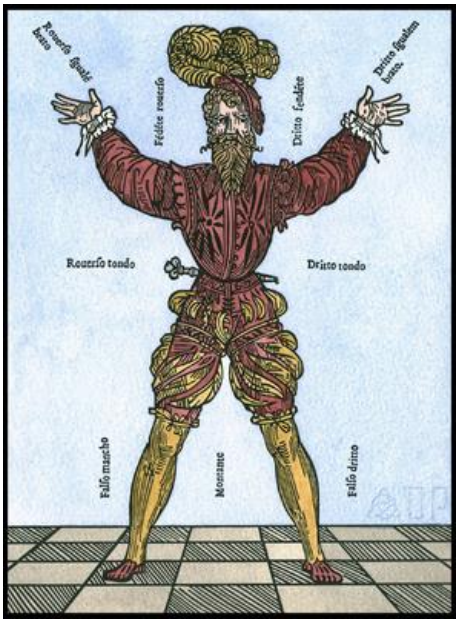
[18] Antonio Manciolino, *Opera Nova*, 1531, translated by W. Jherek Swanger, Wiktenauer.com, Book I, Ch. 18, https://wiktenauer.com/wiki/Antonio_Manciolino accessed 03/28/2023.

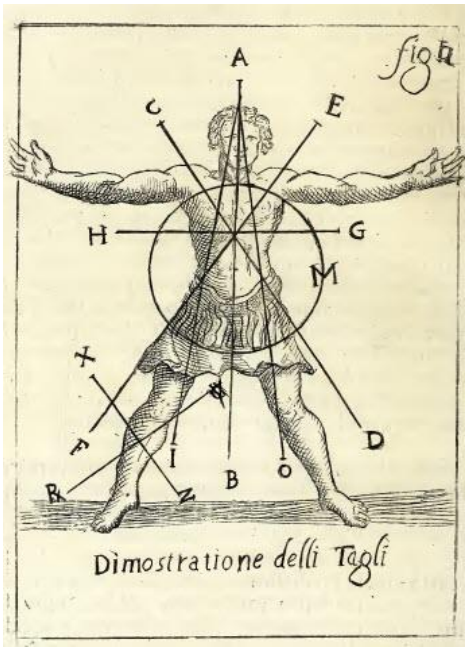
[19] Ibid. See also, same section, Ch. 25, 29, 33 & 34 (a thrust), 35 (should the opponent thrust at one's hand), 36, 42, 48, 50, 51. Cf. Book II, second *assalti*, Ch 3, 4. *NB*: research on Georgian sword and buckler corroborates the value of the hand as target. Mike Cherba, one of the key researchers examining this tradition, has demonstrated the truth of this in a number of ways. First, the minimal hilt of the *khmali* requires the buckler to protect the hand. Second, there are strikes to the forearm from many of the guard positions, often via compound attacks. Lastly, Mike was taught a blow by Niko Abazadze and Vakhtang Kiziria that targets the wrist using the buckler.

[20] Ibid, Ch. 33.

[21] It is important to note that these cut diagrams go back at least as far as Fiore; his *segno* is the earliest one of which I'm aware.



Marozzo, 1536



Marcelli, 1686

We notice the differences perhaps more readily, but in this instance the similarities are important too. The hand and arms were targets in systems antecedent to and active at the same time as rapier; we know that there was cross-over between these systems as they appear in the texts, and, it is also clear that many rapier masters, Pallavicini and Marcelli for example, had read and digested works by their Bolognese predecessors. Both cite the Bolognese authors among others for support in their respective works.

This said, Marcelli makes it clear that he considers the Bolognese works among those antecedent to his own time. In Part I, Book 1, Chapter 1, Marcelli lists a number of "ancient" masters, from the 15th century down to his own time, and states:

> *Sin quì per ordine hò raccolto le memorie de Maestri Antichi, e Moderni, i quali cominciarono à ritrovare i primi principii, e stabilirono un certo modo di operare; il quale dell'Antichità altro non ne ritiene al presente, se non che alcune Massime invariabili, & alucni Assiomi generali. Perche il modo particolare del gioco, e la qualita dell'attioni sono tanto diverse, & alienate de quelle prime, che quasi non le riconosco no ne meno per madri.*
>
> So far I have collected, in order, the memories of ancient and modern maestri, who began to find the first principles and established a certain method of operating; the antiquity of which not retained at present, except some invariable maxims, and some general axioms;

> because the particular method of play, and the qualities of the actions are so different, and so alien to those before, that I almost do not recognize them as their mothers.[22]

He goes on to discuss the perfection of fencing in his time, and while one might debate that point, Marcelli and his contemporaries *do* mark a shift in approach. Where the Bolognese masters included the thrust, the authors of the works on rapier championed it. The cuts were included, but by Marcelli's time arguably represent custom over need. Indeed Marcelli says he includes the cuts out of duty, for completeness, and suggests that the cuts are really only useful as ripostes, and should never be made in the first tempo. For him, and for most masters who wrote about rapier, cuts were inferior to the thrust.[23]

Rapier Treatises

We see fewer direct references to the forward target in the rapier corpus, but it is unclear what this means. Arguing from silence is unwise, so the lack of inclusion should not lead us to believe either that these masters eschewed or assumed the extended hand or arm in considerations of target. We are left to infer what we can from what they *did* include, from what we read in accounts of fights, the nature of the weapons themselves (already covered), and the principles behind all swordplay. Patrick Bratton reminded me that we also must consider the differences in training: even with rebated arms, the mask had not yet been invented and coverings for the hand were likely limited.[24] Steel gauntlets were still in use, but would be cumbersome to use with a rapier, so it is far more likely that if students wore gloves, they used those they wore about town or perhaps a pair out of stout leather. Regardless, even today with all the high-tech gloves available people are sometimes injured, and training at speed and targeting the hand might have led to injuries harder to repair at the time.

The majority of works on rapier I have examined make little to no specific mention of the forward target. Attention is on the chest and head. Even where one might expect it, the masters seem to have preferred one reach for the body. Giuseppe Pallavicini, in discussing why he wants the arm straight on guard explains that it is about ensuring proper measure:

> *Si che stando in guardia, si deve stare con il braccio lungo, e non si deve tenere il braccio raccolto; perche non si potra mai conoscere la distanza della misura, e tenendosi*

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[22] Francesco Marcelli, *Regole delle Scherma*, Roma: Nella Stamperia di Dom. Ant. Ercole, 1686; Lib. Primo, Cap. I, 12-13 (this is as found in the pdf available from the Internet Archive); this translation from Francesco Marcelli, *Rules of Fencing*, trans. by Christopher A. Holzman, Wichita, KS: Lulu Press, 2019, 6. For Marcelli's list, see pages 4-5 starting with Jaume Pons of Perpiñan, Majorca, who published in 1474. Hereafter, Marcelli, *Rules of Fencing*.

[23] See Marcelli, *Regole della Scherma*, 121ff; Marcelli, *Rules of Fencing*, 181ff.

[24] See also Sydney Anglo's comments about school-fencing in *The Martial Arts of Renaissance Europe*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000, 281.

> *il braccio lungho innante, sà stare il vostro contrario lontano, e si viene à conoscere la perfeta misura…*
>
> Being on guard, you must keep the arm extended, and must not hold the arm bent, because you will not ever be able to know the distance of the measure, and holding the arm extended forward, makes your opponent keep his distance, and you come to know the perfect measure…[25]

To a fencer versed in modern epee an additional benefit to this extended guard is that it makes it easier to harry the wrist and forearm should the opponent attack out of measure or fail to close the line. Pallavicini only adds that so long as one adopts this guard well then one can strike to the opponent's shoulder via a glide in fourth should the latter find one's sword on the inside; in the rest of the chapter his target is the face. This is, in my reading, a typical passage. It is not that one could not, conceivably, strike the arm instead, but focus is on the body.

However, there are several sections where Pallavicini specifically mentions the arm.[26] To name only two examples, in Ch. 20, he recommends a *mandobolo*:

> *Et anco se al venire innanti cauasse la sua Spada per di sotto della vostra Spada, e vi tirasse una Imbroccata nella parte di fora della vostra per colpirui nella spalla destra; all'hore voi alzate la sua Spada con li vostro falso filo, e li tirate una Imbroccata sotto la sua Spada, el lo colpite nel suo fianco destro, con abbassare il corpo, e per andare ben guardato, è di bisogno tirare al vostro contrario un Mandobolo; Il quale hà da colpire nel capo del vostro contrario, & anco nel suo braccio destro…*
>
> Also, if in coming forward he makes a cavazione under your sword and delivers an imbroccata to your outside in order to strike your right shoulder, you then raise his sword with your false edge, and strike him with an imbroccata under his sword, hitting him in the right flank, lowering your body. In order to go well guarded, it is necessary to strike your opponent with a mandobolo, which has to strike his head and also his right arm.[27]

In Ch. 43, the master describes attacking the arm with a *stromazzone*:

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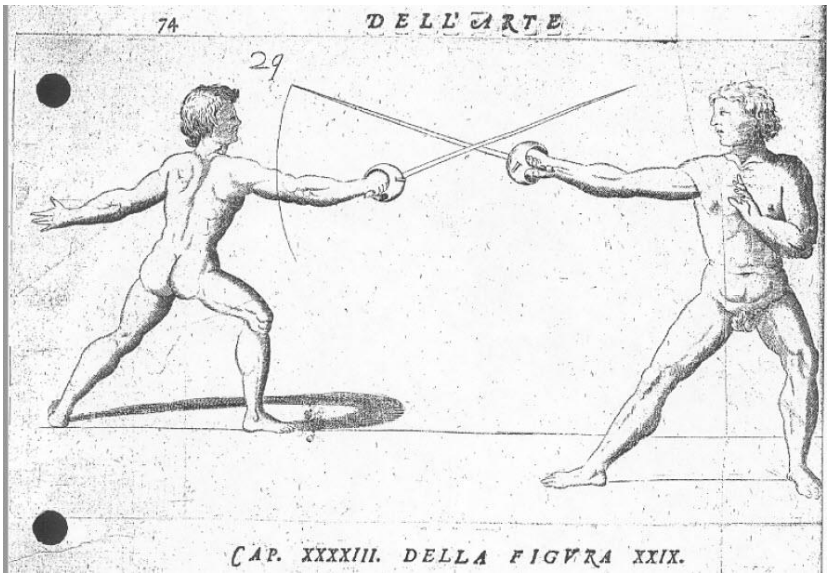
[25] Giuseppe Pallavicini, *La scherma illustrata*, Palermo: Per Domenico d'Anselmo, 1670, 42; for the English, see Giuseppe Pallavicini, *Fencing Illustrated*, Part I., 1670, translated by Christopher A. Holzman, Wichita, KS: Lulu Press, 2018, 114.

[26] Though I do not cover it here, Pallavicini also provides advice for defending the legs, cf. Vol. 1, Ch. 44, 181-182 in Holzman; 75-76 in the pdf.

[27] *La Scherma Illustrata*, 43; Ibid, 118. Pallavicini defines the *mandobolo* as a cut that is made with the wrist and which cuts left to right (78 in Holzman's translation).

Per onde il contrario è all'istesso tempo in dare il passo traversale, e con la mano di quarta si defende, e in riparando, se li tira un stramazzone, in che lo colpisce nel suo braccio destro di taglio, chiamato Stramazzone…

Thus the opponent, in that tempo, makes a transversal step and defends himself with the hand in quarta, and in parrying, performs a stromazzone, in which he strikes him in his right arm with a cut called stromazzone.[28]



Pallavicini, Fencing Illustrated, 1670

In addition, in volume two, Pallavinici discusses attacking the dagger hand. The context consists of facing an opponent who leans forward, front leg bent, rear leg straight, presumably, so the master surmises, to protect the chest:

Como si deve stare in bona guardia piantata, e nò come si scorge, per onde procuri la persona di stare in guardia bene, & il capo in dietro sollenato, acciò non penda la faccia innante; altirmente si espone la persona di essere colpita nella faccia, perche la faccia, e la prima misura, e la second misure, e il petto benche il feritore hà voluto prendere la misura della mano del pugnale, e colpito con un stromazzone nella mano, come si vede, benche Mattheo Galici nostro Palmeritano dava per regolea che nelle risse si procurasse di colpire al braccio del pugnale, cioè il sinistro braccio, il quale stando sperlungato disteso innante per ragione ch'era il primo modo di colpire al contrario

[28] *La Scherma Illustrata*, 74; Ibid, 179. Pallavicini does repeat the term twice in this sentence as Chris points out in his translation. Of note, the master also cites for support Pietro la Torre, Carranza, and de Grassi. Pallavicini defines the *stromazzone* as a cut made with the wrist which begins with the true edge under the opponent's sword, and wounds at the point of the opponent's right shoulder (Holzman, 77).

> Therefore, a person should see to standing in guard well, the head back and elevated so that the face does not lean forward; otherwise, the person exposes himself to being struck in the face, because the face is the first measure and the chest is the second measure. Whilst the wounding fencer has wanted to take the measure of the dagger hand, and struck it with a stramazzone to the hand as is seen, though our *Palermitan, Matteo Galici*, gave as a rule that in fights that he should see to striking the dagger arm, i.e. the left arm, which is extended forward, for that reason that it was the first method of striking the opponent.[29]

Note that Pallavicini adds that Matteo Galici advocated the dagger hand as a solid, first strike target. In focusing on the arm, not surprisingly, Pallavicini was not alone. Camillo Agrippa, for example, has one of his feints made to the forearm, a site presenting less danger to the attacker than a feint to the chest. In his *Tratto di Scientia d'Arme* (1553), Agrippa focuses on the deep target, the torso, rather than the advanced target, but he was clearly aware of the threat the weapon presented to the arm. In Book Two, Chapter 4, for example, Agrippa mentions making a feint to the arm in order to induce the opponent to move. Of note, Ken Mondschein pointed out that the image depicts a feint more to the shoulder than to the arm; this said the word Agrippa uses is *braccio*, the arm:

> *Per quest' alter due figure signate per A. & per D. si dice (immaginandosi che D. habbia fatto una finta al braccio di A. per stimulardlo, come habbianmo detto di sopra ragionando de le diffuse & offese di Quarta Guardia) che non movendosi A. possi D. andare in B. & battendo la punta de la spada di A. con la mano manca…*
>
> Suppose in this case that the fencer on guard in D has made a feint at the arm of the fencer on guard in A in order to make him move, as in the discussion of defense and offense of the fourth guard, and that A didn't move. Fencer D can then go into the position of B and, beating the point of A's sword with his left hand…[30]

To Mondschein's point, *braccio* conceivably could include the shoulder, but as Italian has a specific word for shoulder, *spálla*, translating *braccio* as "arm" on first pass makes the best sense.[31] Indeed Mondschein translates it this way himself. On its own, however, a single reference (and moreover one that might be taken more than one way) is not strong evidence for inclusion of the forward target. There are two additional points that help support this notion.

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[29] Giuseppe Pallavicini, *La Seconda Parte della Scherma Illustrata*, Palermo: 1673, 57-58; for the English, see Giuseppe Pallavicini, *The Second Part of Fencing Illustrated*, 1673, trans. Christopher A. Holzman, Wichita, KS: Lulu Press, 2020, 97-98.

[30] See Camillo Agrippa, *Tratto di Scientia d'Arme*, Roma: Antonio Blado Stampadore Apostolico, 1553; p. 95 in the Internet Archive pdf; for the English, see Ken Mondschein, ed. and trans., *Fencing: A Renaissance Treatise by Camillo Agrippa*, New York, NY: Italica Press, 2009, 68.

[31] See for example Florio's dictionary, *Queen Anna's New World of Words*, 1611, page 518, lists *spálla*. He defines *braccio*, "an arme," on page 69.

First, this is a feint, which by definition threatens a specific area or line in order to induce an opponent to move their weapon to defend thereby opening up a different line or portion of target. Were it not a believable attack, one would not parry and the feint would make little sense to make. By implication, the arm was a viable target.

Second, we see specific mention of the hand as target in still other masters, such as Capo Ferro, a fact which should not surprise us given the fact the hand was a perfectly acceptable option in earlier Italian fencing as the earlier example of Manciolino and Agrippa demonstrate. Capo Ferro makes specific mention of targeting the hand. In his *Gran Simulacro dell'Arte e dell'Uso della Scherma*/*Great Representation of the Art and Use of Fencing* (1610), where he discusses the "Method that One Must Employ Against a Bestial Man," Capo Ferro writes:

> *Se harai all'incontro un huomo bestiale che senza misura e tempo, con gran impito ti tirasse molti colpi, due cose far potrai: prima adoprando il gioco del mezzo tempo, come al suo luoco te l'insegno, lo ferirai, nel suo tirare, di punta o di taglio nella mano o nel braccio della spada, o vero lasciandolo andare a voto con schifar alquanto con la vita indietro e poi spingerli subito una punta nella faccia, o vero nel petto*.
>
> If you have an encounter with a bestial man, that is, one without measure and *tempo*, who throws many blows at you with great impetus, there are two things that you can do: first, adopting the play of *mezzo tempo*, as I teach you in its place, you will strike him during his throwing of a thrust or a cut, in his sword-hand or arm; alternately allow him to go into empty space, evading somewhat backwards with your body, then immediately give him a thrust in the face or chest.[32]

This is not a lone example; Capo Ferro includes additional advice for striking the hand. In Ch. 12, "Uses of Fencing," he suggests that

> *Deve sapere che ogni volta che il tuo avversario havrà la punta della sua spada fuor della tua presentia, o alta o bassa o che guardasse fuor delle tue parti sinistre o destre, tu te li metterai incontro alla mano la punta della tua spada in linea retta, col piegare alquanto la vita indietro, ti accostarai a misura & arrivato che sarai li spingerai una punta di mezzo tempo nella detta mano: col spinger sol la vita innanzi, piegando il ginocchio destro si ferirà; ma avertirai che in tal ferire devi portare il piè sinistro indietro accompagnato col destro & di più havendo il nimico il braccio del pugnale innanzi avanzato, volendolo tu ferire nella mano terrai il medesimo ordine, come di sopra*.

[32] Capo Ferro, *Gran Simulacro dell'Arte e dell'Uso della Scherma*, Siena, 1610, translated by William Wilson and W. Jherek Swanger, Wiktenauer.com, Uses of Fencing, 4. https://wiktenauer.com/wiki/Ridolfo_Capo_Ferro_da_Cagli accessed 03/28/2023. The editor remarks that this may have been lifted from Antonio Manciolino, *Opera Nova*, p. 3 recto.

> You must know that every time that your adversary has the point of his sword outside your presence, either high or low, or that it faces outside your left or right side, you will put the point of your sword opposite his hand in a straight line; leaning your body somewhat to the rear, you will approach to measure, and, having arrived, you will push a thrust in mezzo tempo into the said hand; just by propelling the body forward and bending the right knee will one strike; but you will take care that in such striking you must carry the left foot back, accompanied by the right; and furthermore, the enemy having his dagger arm advanced forward, you, wanting to strike it in the hand, will follow the same directions as above.[33]

Keeping the point on target–any target–is efficient; one can, via the straight line, attack faster than can someone who must bring the point into line first. What Capo Ferro describes here is more or less what we term an *arrest* today. Of note, Capo Ferro, like Pallavicini later, discusses targeting the offhand as well in this passage. Many daggers of the period had little guard, so a logical target would be the off-hand holding the dagger, a point Capo Ferro makes twice, once above, and in covering what to do against someone in what he calls the guard of the left foot:

> *Di più volendo tu essere il primo a ferire la detta guardia di piè manco, ti li metterai all'incontro similmente in terza con la spada in linea retta, facendo che la punta guardi la mano del pugnale del nimico per potergli dare a tua comodità una stoccata di mezzo tempo nella detta mano; o vero li potrai fare una finta sopra il pugnale & volendo egli parare cavarai la tua spada per di sotto il suo pugnale, passando con il piede sinistro innanzi e trovando con il tuo pugnale nell'istesso tempo la spada nimica, lo ferirai di punta sotto il braccio…*
>
> Moreover, if you wish to be the first to strike against the said guard of the left foot, you will put yourself to him in the encounter similarly in terza with the sword in a straight line, making your point aim at your enemy's dagger hand, in order to enable you at your ease to give him a stoccata in mezzo tempo in the said hand; alternately you can make a feint over his dagger, and he wanting to parry, you will disengage your sword under his dagger, passing forward with your left foot, and finding your enemy's sword with your dagger in the same tempo, you will strike him with a thrust under the arm…[34]

Additional evidence we see in Salvator Fabris; he too makes specific mention of the forward target. In his *Scienze d'Arme/Science of Arms* (1606), he offers

> *Questa figura, che segva di mostra la terza guardia, laquale nasce dalla prima, come anco la quarta secondo, che si uedrà; Questa terza è diminore fatica delle altre due,*

[33] Ibid, 12.
[34] Ibid. 25.

perche il braccio stà naturale, se bene la mano troppo bassa, & anco la punta molto angolata allo insù, & perciò con molti scoperti, in modo che se si tirasse una linea retta dalla punta al corpo si uedria quanto fosse grande l' angolo, & tutto quel uacuo, che resta frà la detta linea retta, & la mano, è scoperto, oue si può ferire per di fuori, & per di dentro, & in alcuno di questi lati non hà foraa, oltre il potere essere ferito prima, che si gionga al suo finimento, doue che uolendo diffendersi le parti alte uiene à fare cosi gran moto con la mano, che non può giongere in tempo alla diffesa, & il nimico lo può facilmente ingannare

This plate [*sic* figure] illustrates the guard in tierce, which arises from the guard in prime, as does the guard in quarte, as will be seen. The guard in tierce is less fatiguing than the other two, because the arm is in a natural position. But the hand is too low and the point inclined upwards at an angle, so that there are many exposed parts. If you draw a straight line from the point to the body you will see how great is the angle, and all the space between that straight line and the hand is exposed, where you may be hit on the outside and on the inside. On some sides it is not strong; further you may be hit before your hilt is reached. If you wish to defend the upper parts you make so large a movement with the hand, that you cannot reach the defence in time, and your adversary can easily deceive you.[35]

The line *& le mano è scoperto, oue si può ferire per di fuori, & per di dentro*, makes specific mention of the hand, and suggests that it one would be vulnerable not only to either side, but that the hand would be in danger too.[36]

As a last example, I cite Francesco Marcelli. His *Regole della Scherma/Rules of Fencing* (1686) is a *tour de force* in its coverage of fencing. The most specific instance in which this master refers to the extended target is in Book Three, Chapter Three, Section 10, where he discusses small sword versus small sword. He writes:

Il combattere con l'armi curte eguali, cioè Spadino con Spadino, ò altra simile armatura, si deve far sempre lontano di misura, in modo, che il bersaglio de'colpi sia sempre il braccio destroy del nemico, ò la mano di esso; sì per effere questa la parte píû vicina, quando si stà lontano, come anco per renderlo con la ferita inhabile à reggere il ferro.

Fighting with equal short weapons, i.e., small sword with small sword, or other similar weapons, must always be done far from measure, in a way that the target of the blows would always be the opponent's right arm or hand, due to this part being closest when he

[35] Salvator Fabris, *Scienza d'Arme*, 1606, Bk I, Part I, 27, trans. A.F. Johnson, Wiktenauer.com, https://wiktenauer.com/wiki/Salvator_Fabris accessed 03/27/2023.
[36] See also the translation by Tom Leoni; Salvator Fabris, *Science of Arms*, trans. Tom Leoni, Chivalry Bookshelf, 2005 reprint, 42.

> stands far away, and also for making him unable to handle the weapon due to the wound.[37]

Significantly, Marcelli mentions not only that the hand and arm are the closest targets, but also that should one wound an opponent there, they will be unable to manage their weapon. Given the speed of small sword, and the shortness of the blade, keen attention to measure makes sense, but so too does harrying the advanced target—the hand and arm are not just closer, but expose one less when attempting to strike them. The smaller guard likewise might make the hand a better target than it often is in rapier. It seems reasonable to conclude that Marcelli, while his focus is clearly the face and torso, likely had the extended target in mind in championing his guards over other options. Likewise, the all-important emphasis he places on acting in the right tempo, in covering the line, and in managing measure, all of these if observed would do much to defend one's limbs, especially while attacking.

Small Sword Treatises

We are fortunate that the works on small sword offer us a few examples that are more explicit. In some, like Le Sieur de la Touche's *Les Vrays principes de l'espée seule* (1670), we see less attention to the forward target than we do the awareness that it was vulnerable. De la Touche, for example, dislikes the style of play where a fencer holds the small sword in two hands:

> *D'autres tiennent l'Espée avec les deux mains, c'est à dire, par la poignée de la main droite, & par la Lame avec la main gauche, à fix ou huit poulces de la Garde, parce qu'ils ont de cette façon les parades bien plus fortes, qu'il est tre-difficile de détourner leur Espée, & que quand ils rencontrent celle de l'ennemy, ils la renvoyent si loin qu'ils ont tout loisir de la frapper, mais ils ne prennent pas garde que pour tenir la Lame de la main gauche, il faut qu'ils avancent beaucoup, à l'épaule & la main gauche, que leur l'Adversaire peut offenser & blesser impunément & sans peril, dautant qu'il peut se mettre en mesure ou s'avancer assez pour y atteindre, sans qu'il soit assez prés pour craindre qu'on puisse luy rendre la pareille.*
>
> Others hold the sword with both hands, that is to say, by the grip with the right hand, and by the blade with the left hand, at six or eight thumbs from the guard, because in this fashion they have much stronger parries, because it is very difficult to deflect their sword, and because when they meet that of the enemy, they expel it so far that they have ample opportunity to hit. But they are not aware that to hold the blade with the left hand, they must advance both the shoulder and the left hand much, so that their adversary can offend and injure with impunity and without danger, especially as he can get in measure or

[37] See Marcelli, *Regole delle Scherma*, Lib.Terzo, Cap. III, 85-86 (page 85-86 in the pdf available from the Internet Archive); Marcelli, *Rules of Fencing*, 401.

> advance enough to reach, without being close enough to fear that they can repay him the same.[38]

His complaint here is that to grip the sword this way means holding the shoulders more squared as one faces the opponent, that is to say, exposes one more to danger. De la Touche explicitly cites the shoulder and left hand as vulnerable, which indicates that one might threaten these parts of the body just as much as the torso. Elsewhere this master focuses on the chest, and if his plates are any guide, most thrusts in the high-line anyway are directed at the right-side of the chest. Nonetheless, it seems clear that for de la Touche it was not inconceivable that one might attack the forward target; indeed his preferred guard (tierce) he cites as better than the low guard in quarte or this two-handed guard because it is more secure.

In Donald McBane's *The Expert Sword-man's Companion* (1728), he discusses half-thrusts and how to perform them safely, and makes specific mention of the forward target:

> When Advance upon your Adver-
>
> sarie, make only half Thrusts at him, to
>
> prick him in the Sword Hand, Wrist, or
>
> Arm, but don't push beyond the length
>
> of his Elbow, unless you have a very fair
>
> Open at his Body; this is very safe, and
>
> a few Wounds in the Hand, Wrist, or
>
> Arm, may effect what you desire, to get
>
> the better of him, with little Hazzard to
>
> your self.[39]

The caution McBane urges, and the advantages to harassing the advanced target, are clear. It keeps one safer, keeps the opponent busy, and should one land some of these thrusts they may well end the fight. Marcelli and McBane both note that wounds to the arm or hand might

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[38] Le Sieur de la Touche, *Les vrays Principes de l'Espée seule*, 1670, 15 (pdf. available from the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gallica); the English is from Le Sieur de la Touche, *The True Principles of the Single Sword*, trans. Reinier van Noort and Antoine Coudre, Glasgow, UK: Fallen Rook Publishing, 2016, 42.

[39] Donald McBane, *The Expert Sword-Man's Companion*, Glasgow: James Duncan, 1728, ed. by Jared Kirby, Leonia, NJ: Jared Kirby Rare Books, 2017, 33.

conclude the fight–beyond the potential psychological effects of being wounded, it is hard to continue if one's weapon-arm is damaged. This is a common theme among the works advocating this tactic.

Don Emanuel Friedrich De Bada, a Spaniard who published Sweden's second work on fencing sometime between 1733 and 1742, likewise makes specific mention of the forward target.[40] In Chapter 19 De Bada advises the reader how to handle an adversary who holds the blade out straight. The second option includes the hand and arm: "2nd You engage him very carefully, and move your left foot off your centre to the circumference, so that the head and body fall in quarta, and with the right hand you thrust him, either to his hand, arm, or shoulder, and you cut him in the arm."[41]

A countryman of McBane, Archibald MacGregor, provides another snapshot of the arm and hand as potential target. We know little about MacGregor. He was apparently a "Teacher of Fencing" and had published a theological tract as well as his popular lecture on fencing (1791), one that he delivered in various parts of Scotland, but we do not know much more about him. His lecture on the "Art of Defense" covers broadsword, small sword, spadroon, as well as attempts to trace the history of the Art with notes here or there about technique. Of interest here are his comments about the security to be gained by fencing from the riposte, that is, that one should seek to parry and then strike in turn. MacGregor points out that

> whether a person be either a small or broad sword player, he must pay particular attention, not to longe too far out, for in doing so, he exposes himself to the reports of his oppose. Therefore I prefer half thrusts, or half longes, to wide stretches, or home thrusts: for the last is very dangerous, especially in an earnest engagement with swords; and a few wounds in the sword arm, will soon disable a man, which is far better, and more Christian like, than taking his life, as in general most quarrels arise from mere trifles.[42]

MacGregor, like Marcelli, McBane, and De Bada recognized the dangers inherent in extending the arm to attack.

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[40] Reinier van Noort, who translated De Bada, suggests that *Kort anledning til de subtileste grep i fäcktare-konsten* (*Short introduction to the most subtle techniques in the art of fencing*) was likely published in the first few years after 1733.

[41] Don Emanuel Friedrich De Bada, *Short Introduction to the Most Subtle Techniques in the Art of Fencing*, Lund: SE, ca. 1733, translated by Reinier van Noort, 2016; pdf available at www.bruchius.com; this section, page 14. I was unable to acquire the original text, thus here I have only the translation.

[42] Archibald MacGregor, "Lecture on the Art of Defense," 1791, in *Highland Broadsword: Five Manuals of Scottish Regimental Swordsmanship*, ed. by Paul Wagner & Mark Rector, Highland Village, TX: Chivalry Bookshelf, 2004, 138. For a short overview of MacGregor and this piece, see page 45-49. See also *MacGregor's Lecture on the Art of Defense*, London, UK: Paisley, 1791, pdf available via the Library of Congress, https://loc.gov/resource/rbc0001.2019gen23669?r=-0.708,0.002,2.416,1.484,0

In many works we see actions which might include threats to the extended target, but which could as easily target the torso. For example, some small sword masters, such as P.J.F. Girard in his *Traité des armes* (1740), advocated half-thrusts, especially as a method of feinting.[43] This style of thrust not only reduces one's chance of being hit in the forward target, being shorter, but could threaten the hand and arm of one's opponent as we saw with McBane. This is borne out not only by the fact the half-thrust was a popular method to feint, but also that the only target a half-thrust threatens from normal measure, e.g. lunging distance, is the opponent's arm. Even with lunges made firm-footed the distance between fencers was just out of range; an engagement in tierce or quarte, generally, is made with the foible. To gain leverage one moves the arm and/or feet to gain the sword; one does not start from a distance where either party can reach the other with ease.

MacGregor was lecturing and published during a time when wearing swords was quickly going out of fashion, and where dueling with swords, in England anyway, was more or less a thing of the past.[44] His notion of morality, however, was shared by at least one other author, Jonas Thomsen von Wintzleben, who remarked that fencing was meant to protect oneself, not to commit murder.

Von Witzleben, whose treatise *Fegte-Kunst* was published in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1756, spends an entire chapter on what he terms "gallantry-thrusts." These are a species of attacks intended not to dispatch an opponent, only to wound them, and one hopes, end the fight:

> *Efterdi denne Adelige Fegte-Kunst ikke læres, for at myrde eller ombringe sin Næste, saa er nødvendig at vide, paa en subtil og honet Maade, at conserbere sin egen Honneur, Velfaerdt, ja, vel og Liv og Lemmer, om man uformodentlig' skulle blive overfaldet; saa haver jeg mig foresat, nogle Lectioner, som af mig blive kaldede: 1) Gallanterie-Stødene; 2) Snell-hug; 3) Espadonere og de fire Kryds-Hugg; hermed paa en eenfoldig Maade at demonstrere.*
>
> Seeing that this noble art of fencing is not learned to murder or kill your neighbor, it is necessary to know how to preserve your own honour, your welfare, yes, also your life and limbs, in a subtle and honest manner if you should unexpectedly be assaulted. Thus, I have decided to demonstrate hereby in a simple manner some lessons that, by me, are called 1) the gallantry-thrusts, 2) the snap-cuts, 3) spadrooning and the four cross-cuts.[45]

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[43] P.J.F. Girard, *Traité des armes*, La Haye, Les Pays-Bas: Chez Pierre de Hondt, 1740, 68ff; see also Philip T. Crawley, ed. and trans., *The Art of the Smallsword, featuring P.J.F. Girard's Treatise of Arms*, Wyvern Media, UK: 2014, 117ff.

[44] Cf. A.V.B. Norman, *The Rapier and Small-sword 1460-1820*, Reprint Ken Trotman Publishing, 2019, 30-31.

[45] See Jonas Thomsen von Wintzleben, *The Noble Art of Fencing condensed, or Instruction in Thrust and Cut*, Copenhagen: T. L. Bourpe, 1756, translated by Reinier van Noort in *Scandinavian Smallsword*,

Von Witzleben is keen that one naturally preserve oneself, so his inclusion of attacks meant to wound but not kill an opponent, all while keeping one safe, are of particular import. What he advises accords well with the suggestions from those masters already covered. For example, von Wintzlebon recommends that

> *Naar man af sin Fiende med blot Gevær skulde blive angrebet, da maa man meget vel observere den Mensur eller Spatium, som findes imellem sig selv og Fienden; thi man maa ingenlunde lade Fienden komme nærmere ind paa Livet, end at begge Svagerne af deres Kaarde-Klinger just kand røre hinanden, som for Eksempel: man bliver indvendig paa sin Svage attaqueret af sin Fiende, da støder man ham Qvart à Tempo udvendig efter Armen i en temmelig Vinkel, Kaarde-Spidsen i Høyden, og Fæstet lidet sinket, og saa snart Stødet er fuldbragt, (man maaa have troffet, eller ey) saa giør man dog en Battut udvendig langs hans Kaarde-Klinge, for at forhindre Fienden i sit Contra-Stød*.
>
> When you are assaulted by your enemy with a drawn weapon, then you must very closely observe the measure or space that there is between yourself and your enemy. Because you must by no means let your enemy closer to your body than where the two weaks of the blades of your swords can just touch one another. For example: if you are attacked by your enemy on the inside of your weak, then thrust a quarte in tempo at his arm on the outside at a significant angle, the point of your sword raised and your hilt lowered a little. And as soon as the thrust is completed (whether you have hit or not), nonetheless make a beat on the outside along the blade of his sword, to frustrate your enemy in his counter-thrust.[46]

Ensuring proper measure, striking with opposition, and adding an action meant to protect one when in recovery from the lunge (in this case a beat) all make sense. Similar maneuvers attend any thrust to the body as well; the only difference is target.[47]

"It's just a Flesh Wound!"

In Olympic foil fencing the arms, legs, and head are "off-target;" in some historical fencing rule-sets arms grant one fewer points than head or torso.[48] Outside of epee and pre-electric sabre,

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LuLu Press, 2017, especially 118-121. Hereafter, *Scandinavian Smallsword*. The Danish is from a pdf of the text, *Den adelige Fegte-kunst i et kort Begreb: eller Underviisning i Stød og Hug, ziiret med behørige Figurer*, Kiøbenhavn: T.L. Borup, 1756, Ch. III, p. 151, the Royal Danish Library, http://www.kb.dk/e-mat/dod/130020341662.pdf . My sincere thanks to Reinier van Noort for assisting me with the transliteration of the Dutch–*Echt heel erg bedankt!*

[46] *Scandinavian Smallsword*, 118. Page 152 in the pdf from the Royal Danish Library.

[47] The value of the forward target was universal—see, for one example, the advice in *Heihō Kaden Sho* (*The Family-Tansmitted Book on Swordsmanship*) where the very first attack targets the fists, in Hiroaki Sato, ed., *The Sword and the Mind*, Woodstock, NY: The Overlook Press, 1986, 26.

[48] We see this reflected in surviving rapier manuals, most of which favor the chest and head, but also in many modern rulesets. See for example the rules for the SoCal Swordfight (2019), p. 3

where attacks to the arm are commonplace, the limbs are decidedly secondary targets. Competitive fencing, of whatever type, is a game and thus regulated by rules, but in reality a wound of most any kind is not something one is likely to shake off; the stories of those who did, on the balance, represent an extreme minority.

Adrenaline, rage, and the heightened emotional state often found in those who realize that they have received a mortal wound do much to explain the exceptions. For small sword, a prime example of this state and wounds to the extended target comes from the post-mortem report from a duel which took place in 1712. Significantly, there appears to have been little fencing *qua* fencing in the duel between Lord Mohun and the Duke of Hamilton—they rushed at one another and set to with little caution. Both men ended up dying, and significantly, both received multiple wounds. Their off-hands were lacerated as well, and in fact according to one account three of Mohun's fingers on the left hand were nearly severed. Hamilton also suffered a severed artery in his right arm.[49]

Details are, alas, often sparse in accounts of duels; they tend to be general rather than specific with regard to both outcome and wounds. There are, however, some affairs that record more details than others–it is not always clear how accurate these narratives are, but they at the very least indicate what was believed possible if not common. For example, Brantôme relates a duel between two men, Bourdeille and Cobios, where the latter was wounded in the hand.[50] For duels involving high-profile individuals we often have multiple accounts. One such duel is the "duel des Mignons," or "duel of the darlings," so-called because the principals involved were favorites of King Henri III of France (d. 1589). There were three pairs of duelists in this affair. Seconds sometimes fought alongside their principals at the time, and in fact two of the seconds, Ribérac and Maugiron, fought first and both died on the spot. According to Vital d'Audiguier, Maugiron was struck first and Ribérac impaled himself on the former's weapons in his haste to kill him.[51]

[https://hemarulesets.files.wordpress.com/2018/07/socal-swordfight-2019-longsword-rules.pdf] accessed 04/06/2023.

[49] Many histories of the duel recount this affair. See for example Robert Baldick, *The Duel: A History*, New York, NY: Barnes & Noble, 1996, 71-72; Richard Cohen, *By the Sword*, New York, NY: Random House, 2002, 58-63; V.G. Kiernan, *The Duel in European History*, 99-100. A common feature of many early small sword treatises is the use of the off-hand to check a blade on the inside line once it has been parried in order to prevent a double hit; less often one reads that one can parry with the hand, though there are masters who included this maneuver. Earlier small swords sometimes sported blades with sufficient edges to sharpen—while not effective as cut-and-thrust weapons, the blades were sharp enough to wound and discourage one from seizing the blade.

[50] See George H. Powell, trans., *Duelling Stories of the Sixteenth Century, from the French of Brantome*, London, UK: A.H. Bullen, 1904, 126-127.

[51] See Vital d'Audiguier, *Le Vray et Ancien Usage des Duels*, 1617, 425 [pdf available via BnF Gallica, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6250194g/f456.double].

The same author relates that the principals, Quelus and Antraguet fought and that the latter was pierced in the arm.[52] The last pair, Chomberg and Livarrot also fought; Chomberg delivered a cut to Livarrot's face, and Livarrot ran him through the chest. Five of the participants died, two on the spot, three died shortly after, and the one survivor, Antraguet, fled. Between d'Audiguier, Brantôme (who also covers this duel), and Pierre de L'Estoile, some details differ, especially how long it took the three mortally wounded men to die, but overall we gain a picture of how the duel progressed.[53] While any assessment of the psychological state of the combatants is at best tentative, it is worth noting that the reactions of the fighters varied. Ribérac and Maugiron may, as Vincent Le Chevalier noted, have suffered the effects of a double. Ribérac may also have failed to cover the line or in good "HEMA" fashion, suffered an afterblow.

In the firearms community there is a term, “psychological stop,” that is appropriate in considering attacks to the hand or arm. This is a decision moment where an attacker’s wound changes their approach, either from pain, shock, fear, or some combination. Our reaction to injury, even an accident, never mind potential shock, generally produces fear and concern for how grave the injury might be, what treatment it may require, and how debilitating it might prove in the future. The masters who mention that wounds to the forward target could mean the end of an encounter are speaking to this notion. Anecdotally, we know that wounds did not always mean the end of a fight, but then we have incomplete records for how many duels, for example, might have ended thanks to a non-fatal injury. Later period, “first blood” duels, reflect a different mindset, as do martial games such as the *Mensur*.[54]

Later period duels to the first wound differed in outlook—the goal was to make the first wound, not kill the opponent, and while by no means devoid of fear, there was a difference in expectations. One was reasonably sure one would walk away, win or lose. In a similar way, games like the *Mensur*, which people opted/opt to do for fun, produce a different fear; not unimportant, but different. This goes for the dubious “bouts with sharps” popular among the fringe element in “HEMA” today as well. In the latter two cases, these are people who set out to

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[52] Ibid.

[53] See Pierre de Bourdeille, Seigneur de Brantôme, *Discours sur les Duels*, 1589-1614, 312 [BnF Gallica, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k206350p/f316.double]; Pierre de L'Estoile, *Mémoires-Journaux*, 1578, 243 [available via the BnF Gallica site, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k25722t/f1.item]; see also Jean de Taille, *Discours Notable des Duels*, 1609, 82 [pdf available via Bibliothèque numérique de Lyon, https://numelyo.bm-lyon.fr/f_view/BML:BML_00GOO0100137001102821084/IMG00000001]. For an excellent overview of this duel, see Vincent Le Chevalier's website, Ensis sub Caelo, "Tales of the French duels: Duel des Mignons," https://blog.subcaelo.net/ensis/tales-french-duels-duel-des-mignons/ ; his version is, in my view, better presented than Alfred Hutton's more pedestrian treatment in his *The Sword and the Centuries*, Reprint, New York, NY: Barnes & Noble Books, 1995, 133-138; cf. Brioist, et al., *Crosier le fer*, 248-249.

[54] For the *Mensur*, see J. Christoph Amberger, *The Secret History of the Sword*, *Burbank*, CA: Unique Publications, 1998, especially the account of his own experience fighting with the *Schläger*, 47-53; in the same work see also 211-218; Kevin McAleer, *Dueling: The Cult of Honor in Fin-de-Siècle Germany*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994.

fight with sharps, more as a pastime, not as people who find themselves in sudden situations of self-defense or called out to fight a duel to the death.

Conclusions

It is my hope that this short survey will encourage other historical fencers to consider the forward target in their study of rapier and small sword. In no way do the conclusions shared here chip away at the major targets for either weapon—the sources are nearly unanimous in urging fencers to thrust to the body, and in the case of rapier, the head as well. However, in addition to the explicit mention of the extended target, there is an important implication to consider. The gradations of measure the masters share, the concern for avoiding the *incontro* or double hit, and the fact that so many actions, such as the half-thrust or feint to the arm, might lead to striking that lead target before or instead of the body, argue for the inclusion of the hand and forearm in our study.

I have not included the potential legal impact for fights that result in wounds versus death, but this is another avenue that might shed additional light on choice of target. As a last point, many first-blood combats in more recent dueling history suggest a long history of including the limbs as targets. Angelini's abhorrence of duels to the first blood, for example, makes little sense if such duels were not common practice. In his *Italian Chivalric Code*, 1883, Angelini remarks that in a "serious duel" with sabres that one must wear a stout glove and cuff lest a cut to the arm stop the duel. For Angelini, if one evades "the established conditions for combat… the duel would become ridiculous."[55] We know from accounts of such duels, be they late like Aldo Nadi's or one of many 19th century newspaper articles covering duels, that duels with swords to the first touch included the arm and hand.[56]

The explicit mention of the arm and hand as targets suggest that these are viable targets in rapier and small sword. They are smaller targets, generally, but if the modern epee fencer and sabreur can learn to make such precision attacks, there is no reason to believe their predecessors could not. It is tempting to see the scattered inclusion of the forward target as outliers in the corpus;

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[55] See Ch. X, § 31, Achille Angelini, *Italian Chivalric Code*, 1883, trans. by Christopher A. Holzman, Wichita, KS: Lulu Press, 2016, 54.

[56] Carl A. Thimm, *A Complete Bibliography of Fencing and Duelling*, 1896, Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 1998, includes an appendix, "Notes on Fencing & Duelling," which includes a number of accounts of duels, 433 ff; see also Jacopo Gelli, *Bibliografia del Duello*, Milano, IT: Ulrico Hoepli, 1903; Gelli also covers notable duels in his *Duelli e Duellanti del Seicento*, Milano, IT: Tipografia degli Operai, 1892; Nadi recounts his own duel in both *On Fencing*, 1943, Sunrise, FL: Laureate Press, 1994, 24-35, and in his autobiography, *The Living Sword*, 1955, Sunrise, FL: Laureate Press, 1995, 138-152. In Nadi's version, he was wounded once, his opponent six times, three times in the arm, three in the chest (*On Fencing*, 33). Schlager7's Youtube channel preserves some early 20th cen. footage of duels, mostly first-touch, epee duels, and is another data point, cf. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Emws7aA69WE&list=PLDs1cQdwmii-JJWQFIJm5rogdD52cG_bJ

certainly, there is far greater attention to the body and head. This said, it is difficult to conclude that lack of inclusion of the forward target in so many texts means the masters disdained it.

Based on the random sample presented here, it is far more likely that rapier and small sword masters, working at a time when duels to the death were normal if nonetheless illegal, opted to focus on fighting to "conclusion," that is, to those attacks most likely to kill one's adversary. This said, it is reasonable to believe that these masters would not have punished students for striking the arm; if anything, they may have urged students to extra caution in such cases as wounded opponents sometimes become more unpredictable and aggressive.[57] The fact we possess references to the forward target demonstrates not only that this area was included in their approach to fencing, but also that some actively taught students to exploit the advanced target. As Marcelli, McBane, and Da Bada, to name three, pointed out, proper measure and threatening or wounding the hand or forearm was less risky than a lunge to torso. And, should one strike those forward targets, one might very well conclude the affair with a better chance of not being hit oneself which, as one 17th century French playwright famously noted, was the goal.

[57] My evidence for this is not merely historical, but personal. I spent many years competing in martial arts, and have witnessed for myself how injury or pain affect opponents, and, how it affects me. The night before a tournament, for example, a fellow student broke my nose while training, and despite seeing stars, and considerable bleeding, it enraged me and I had to be pulled away by my coaches. Despite the fact that most people, as mentioned above, may stop fighting when injured, a fighter must never assume this will happen; it is best to be prepared for the person who, once injured, is fueled by adrenaline and becomes either unpredictable and/or more aggressive.