

# Sword and Buckler

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## Introduction:

This class is intended to give some practical instruction on the use of the Sword and Buckler, largely based on the I.33 manuscript, but also drawn from practical experience in SCA fighting.

First we will quickly review the guards. Most have been covered in the prerequisite classed, but they are included here with their medieval names and can now be demonstrated with buckler in hand.

## Guards

Below is a list of all of the offensive-guards (“Custodia” in Latin) used in the **I.33 manuscript (late 13<sup>th</sup> Century)**, along with their description in terms of our guard terminology when possible.

[Skip ahead to Counters]

**“Underarm”** / the **first Custodia** /  
(held by the left hip or left armpit)



**Low-Left**



**“Right Shoulder”** /the **second Custodia** /  
(on or near the right shoulder)



**High-Right**



**“Left Shoulder”** /the **third** Custodia /  
(on or near the left shoulder)

**High-Left**



**“Right Side”** or **“Nebenhut”**/the **fifth** Custodia /  
(hand held to the left rear, palm facing right)

**Low-Right**



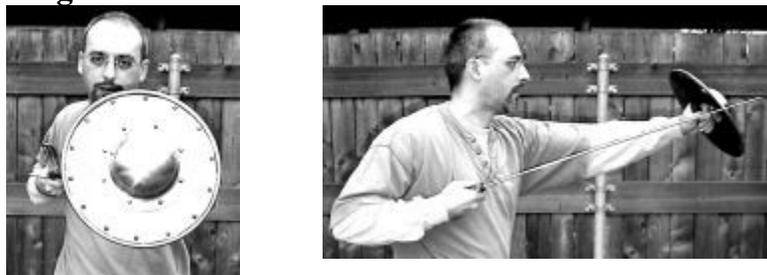
**“Vom Tag”** /the **fourth** Custodia /  
(above the head, hand normal, sword tip up or down behind)

**High-Center(Simple)**



**“Pflug”** /the **sixth** Custodia /

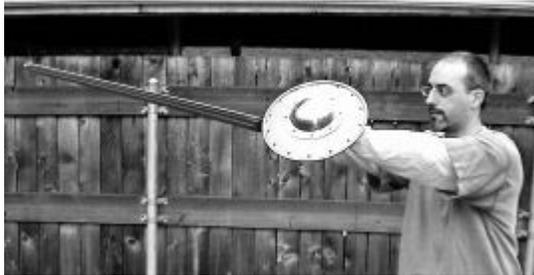
**Couched**



(couched like a lance to the right armpit)

(Excellent, well stabilized, thrusting position. Does not offer much of your sword to the opponent to bind or deflect)

**“Longpoint”** /no number given/ **Long-Point(Central)**  
(sword point extended directly in front of you, hand normal)



I.33notes that long-point is naturally achieved during the 'impact portion' of any blow.

It is important to notice now that the extended sword hand is now either above or below the buckler hand if the buckler is defending the right side of your sword hand.

**“High Longpoint”** /no number given/ **Long-Point(Palm Up)**  
(sword point extended, on left side, hand rotated palm up)

**“FiddleBow”** /no number given/ **rested on left forearm**



**“Priest's Special Longpoint”/no number given/ “Iron Chicken” (Turned)**

*(This is a difficult position to understand based on the pictures in the I.33 manuscript. My interpretation could easily be incorrect.)*



(Offers great cutting and binding potential, but is dangerous to “pose” in)

**“Priest's Special Second Guard” “Walpurgis” /no number given/ High-Right-TrueVertical**



*(This may be a neutral, 'resting' position. The I.33 manuscript warns against 'laying in' your Guard or Counter, lest your opponent see what your intent is and attack that position's weaknesses before you use the position's strengths. This being said, there may be some neutral position from which you move to a Guard or Counter right before that Guard or Counter's use. This position is saved towards the end of the manuscript like the Priest's Special Long-Point, even though that Guard is said to be able to do what all the other Guards can do. This adds weight to the idea that the author may be saving universal and important material for the end of the manuscript, after the reader has developed a full understanding of the rest of the material. Additionally this Ward is shown with a woman holding it, perhaps to emphasize its ease of use. In I.33, she is shown moving from this position to the all-important Counter of Half-Shield. This is a natural and quick movement from a resting, non-committed stance to an important Counter. Experimentation shows that the Priest's Special Second Ward can easily be moved to most of the Guards and Counters in the system.)*

**The Preferred Thrust** It should be noted that in I.33 the preferred thrust enters at the opponent's

right side (coming from your left side). This is often accomplished from the following guards: Low-Right, Low-Left, Priest's Special Longpoint.



## Counters

In the I.33 manuscript a Guard is correctly nullified by facing it with the correct “Counter” (or a correct opposing Guard). I.33 gives detailed examples of what Counter or Guard should be used against what opposing Guard. It follows this by explaining the particular blow or binding action that is best initiated from that position. It also illustrates what should befall the hapless combatant that fails to adopt the correct Counter or Guard.

Note that the Buckler protects the sword hand, usually appearing on whichever side the opponents sword is on. Also note that the opponents threatening sword is usually removed from play by way of a binding action before a counter-attack is made.

Finally, note that I.33 warns against 'laying in' your Guard or Counter and instead advises that one seize the initiative and immediately launch the advantageous attack or bind if your opponent fails to make the best defense or counter-move to your threat.

The complex interplay of the various counters and guards is, frankly, beyond me. I have, however found that getting comfortable with these positions, and with the cuts, thrusts, and blocks that stem from them, allows some intuitive and effective use.

### **“Half-Shield”**

### **Central-Vertical**

– really a “low” guard since blows will compass away from the opponent then upward from the



left or the right. Or should it be seen as a neutral position that can fall away into any of the guards?

**“Rare and Special Counter”**

**Rested-at-Thigh**



– a variant of Low-Left (provides an excellent preferred thrust)(can lift to hanging sword-block)

**“the Crutch”**

**High-Hanging-Guard**

(...with the shield arm above sword-hand to protect it)



**“Left Cover”**

**High-Hanging-Guard**

(with the shield arm below and to the right of the sword-hand to protect it)



(can be followed by a nice High-Guard Snap)

**“Strange and Very Rare Opposition”** (pg246)



(This picture is a little deceptive, as it is not obvious that the sword-hand is a foot in front of the chest.)

**[Skip this section in lecture]**

**Understanding some classic SCA guards in our terms:**

### The Classic Bellatrix right-shoulder guard:



[the following analysis could use more work]

According to our school of thought, the beginning position is actually a **High-Center-Hanging(palm up)** that has drifted near the shoulder. The natural cut from here is an upward diagonal or horizontal cut (either staying as high as the head, or scooping down, at the start, for a lower target) traveling from right to left. When used for an off-side shot, the elbow is first pulled in, changing the hand position to a more standard High-Right guard. The return from an inside shot is to continue the cut around to end in the same guard again, or to stop on target and pull back to Low-Right, then lift to the original guard again.

This is a good spot to refine the Belatrix Snap:

Getting in a good starting position:

- holding the arm out, palm up
- moving it back and to your right until it can't go any farther
- bend the elbow to the guard position.

This procedure allows the turn of the body to immediately transfer to the arm.

### The Iron Chicken or High Guard:



[this definition could use more work]

This Guard is, in essence the same as **High-Center-Front-Hanging** guard. Variants include being “Forward” with the tip or with the tip straight towards the left side, or somewhat to the rear. Another variant has the hand a little bit to the right side (making it a High-Right-Front-Hanging guard) Being shifted forward of the head, reduces its natural power for shots traveling left to right, but increases power for shots traveling right to left. Identical to High-Center guard, it has three variants; Simple, Palm-Up, and Palm-In...with the same shots associated with them.

Being forward of the head, less torso rotation is required for the upward traveling shots to be executed. Because the striking position for this blow (when cutting down from the right) is usually kept awkwardly high, it requires a special return (lifting the elbow).

### **Straight Down the Back**



Notice that one can easily move from Iron Chicken to the Belatrix guard by simply lifting the hand over the head from one guard to the other. The sword's angle stays the same.

### **[Resume Lecture]**

#### **Some Final Thoughts on Guards / Counters:**

By understanding the concepts of placing things along the track of the figure8 and of active blocking, we quickly understand that a guard is not such a big deal. It is only a temporary resting-place for the sword. Any placement of the sword comes with advantages and disadvantages in regard to your defense and offense. By easily moving between guards, you optimize your options and your opponent's confusion.

Additionally, you help to stave off fatigue.

### **Defense in Sword and Buckler:**

First we should note some general principles. The buckler is not a shield. The buckler's primary use is to defend your sword hand and arm... since these will be extended in front of you to use your sword for defense. More than anything, the buckler is insurance. It is absolutely critical to master fluid block to blow transitions so that the sword can be used effectively in both defense and offense without pause. This is why the previous two classes are prerequisites, as they form the true core of sword and buckler fighting. The buckler simply allows you to hold your sword and arm in front of you without getting it hacked off.

### **Priorities of defense:**

#### **[Demonstrate and drill each feature below]**

**Range** (distance) is your first and foremost defense. Never stand in side sword range when it is not in some way to your advantage to do so.

**The threat of attack** is your second defense. This is where the various “guards” and thrusting positions come into play. When they start to approach, feeling confident that they can handle the threat that has been presented, change guards and show them a different threat....or if they are ill prepared..attack.

**Suppressing their attack with a bind** is another form of defense. This is a very common response in I.33 in which you engage your opponent's sword and carry it out of line...often pinning it there with your buckler before moving to attack. It seems intuitive that, with real swords, one would be hesitant to close to attacking range if one had not first put your opponent's weapon out of play. While possible in SCA fighting, this approach is particularly difficult to do at speed. To some degree this difficulty is enhanced by the un-swordlike properties of our weapons. In our less life-and-death game, sometimes it is a good gamble to simply **throw into their attack**, and then “take your turn” at throwing a blow...relying on their disarray to give you time.

One can also **attack and defend simultaneously**. Most often this takes the form of a “shield knock”, consisting of a thrust with the shield protecting the hand, but in such a line as to also interfere with your opponent's threat of attack or actual attack.

Finally we can cover the basic “**static blocks**” although all of them are designed to lead easily to a counter-attack.

The counter **Half Shield** can be simply moved into interference with your opponent's attack. After such a block, a traditional response would be to bind down their weapon before counter attacking. In our game you can often simply attack, having let the sword fall back to one of the Guard or thrusting positions from which to launch an attack.

One can move to **The Crutch** (sword in Hanging Guard *under* the buckler hand) either from Half Shield or from one of the guards. Or, you can present Crutch as you Counter. From here you can bind, attack after falling back to one of the guards, or thrust.

Similarly, One can move to **Left Cover** (Sword in Hanging Gurard Over the buckler hand) either from Half Shield or from one of the guards. Or, you can present Left Cover as you Counter. From here you can bind, attack after falling back to one of the guards, or thrust.

**Blocking with the buckler alone** is a last ditch defense and is unreliable at best.

**Against a full size shield**, the Sword and Buckler fighter must use all their wiles. Use range to only allow engagement when you can find an advantage. If they succeed in closing the distance, sometimes you can smother their sword (cup hilt) with your buckler to gain time to throw some blows or disengage. Footwork is going to be key.

**Against a bigger weapon** (like a spear), make short the distance between your sword and their weapon. In this case, binding and deflecting actions work well. Put aside their weapon, close distance, smother their weapon with your body and throw lots of blows.

### **Conclusion:**

Ultimately, success with sword and buckler comes from being keenly focused on your opponent, feeling and responding to their intent to move before they are aware of it. Full integration of offensive and defensive sword-work allows you the chance to make this happen. Correct use of your buckler helps keeping you from losing an arm while you do this.

**[armored practice with sword and buckler]**