

English Longsword

Translated for German / Italian Longsword HEMA Students



English longsword is a separate branch to the more established Italian and German traditions. The source material is very limited so there are far more holes that need to be filled with speculation than the aforementioned traditions. The goal of this document is to provide a helpful key for students of the German or Italian schools to understand English longsword terms and concepts through the lens of what they already know. This is not a comprehensive document, only an introduction.

Coming from a background in the German tradition, I find it very interesting that there is no mention of feeling in the techniques or chases. Further, the quick displacing cuts seem to be how the English system controls the centerline and manages the fight. Very little winding, lots of displacement and thrusting (absetzen). This is my opinion based on my limited research and interpretation of plays. It is also worth noting that many of the chases work better in our testing if done one handed, especially those techniques where you are cutting with what I would consider to be wrong foot forward for two-handed cutting mechanics.

The Sword



Some English sources take advantage of one or two handed techniques, so a sword that is small enough to use in one hand is probably appropriate. Swords of this size exist in surviving examples. Note that some period drawings and historical example swords are very large, so the types of swords for these sources fall firmly into the speculation category.

Guards and Wards

Note that the sources do not call these out as guards, there are no “guards” mentioned specifically in the source material. Based on context, it is likely that the reader is assumed to know guards as statements are made that call out certain positions that are consistent with what we would call a “guard” in the German or Italian traditions.

- Roebuck - A point forward high guard on either side, like the antlers on a buck.
 - Ochs in the German Tradition
- The Hawk - Holding the sword in a position ready to throw a cut.
 - Vom Tag in the German Tradition
- Stop Guard - Point forward guard with hands near the waist and tip of the sword pointed at the opponent.
 - Phlug in the German Tradition
- The Boar - Sword held in front with the tip aimed down to avoid binding.
 - Alber in the German Tradition
- The Dragon’s Tail - Similar to the boar guard but the point is away from the opponent, ready to throw a rising cut.
 - Posta de coda lunga in the Italian tradition
- The Pendant - Similar to Roebuck with the tip of the sword aimed down. The hilt can be held high or medium height.
 - Hangen in the German tradition
 - Finestra in the Italian tradition
- Ground - Three meanings:
 - The space you occupy.
 - Outside measure (zuefechten)
 - Resting fighting stance, what you return to when out of measure. Many of the techniques say “return to ground” at the end.

Attacks

- Foin - Thrust
- Hawk - downward strike
 - Scheitelhau - German
 - Fendente - Italian
- Quarter Stroke - downward diagonal cut
 - Oberhau - German
 - Fendente - Italian
- Cross Stroke - Horizontal cut
 - Mittelhau - German
 - Mezzane - Italian
- Contrary Hawk, Contrary Quarter - risking strike on the same place as the respective cut.

- Unterhau - German
- Sottone - Italian
- Rake - Wrist Cuts, fast but weak. Can be rising or falling.
 - Stromazzone - Italian
- Rabbits - countercuts against an opponent's weapon. Should set up a favorable bind for a counter cut or thrust. Although these are cuts, they are defensive.
 - Dempfhau in German tradition

Footwork

- Pass Step - One foot passes in front of the other
- Simple Step - Forward foot moves, then the rear follows.
- Cock Step - Variation of the simple step, the front foot kicks forward while the rear springs forward at the same time.
- Void Step - Passing step backwards
- Traverse step - a passing step that is aggressively offline, or diagonal
- Great Step - a very large step, done while attacking

Techniques

- Bow Foin - Halfsword thrust
- Broken Foin - A thrust with blade contact on the opponent's sword.
- Snatch - a snapping cut around from pendant guard
 - Schnappen - German, but this seems to apply to wrist cuts (rakes) as well as a full cut around
- Spring - A sudden long range attack with only one hand holding onto the sword near the pommel for max range. Often a foin, but can be a cut.
- Double Round - Two large cuts performed right after one another. (Seems similar to greatsword movements.)
- Carter Stroke - A whipping, one handed cut to the opponent's head. Also called the fool cut.
- Reverence to the Cross - You block with your true edge on the strong of your blade. The parry is known as the crown. With context the parry is done with a step forward to shutdown an incoming attack and set up grapples, disarms, and other close techniques.
 - Kron in German but with the context of closing.
 - Posta de corona in Italian with the context of closing.
- Wasted Cuts - Cuts that miss their targets on purpose. A feint or misdirection technique.
- Void Attacks - An attack made while dodging an attack, often a passing step back.
 - For example, a void quarter cut or a void foin.
- (There are more techniques, but these give a good feel for the system....)

Flourishes (My interpretations with help from sources)

- The First Flourish

A Quarter fair before you, delivered with one hand. Voiding back the left foot with another Quarter with both hands. A Downright stroke voiding back the left foot, standing still play 3 Rakes lightly cutting to the elbows, with a Quarter fair before you with both hands. And 2 Quarters after with 2 turns, a Downright-stroke voiding back the left foot. Standing still play the said 3 Rakes with a Quarter fair before you and 2 Quarters after with 2 turns. A Downright-stroke setting forth the right foot as forward as your left with a broken thrust upon the left side, another on the right side turning the sword under the right arm. Bring it with the same side with a broken thrust upon the left side, another upon the right side, turning your sword set the point soft before you upon the ground.

1. Start left foot forward and sword in right hand.
2. Cut a quarter cut (oberhau) with a single hand (left shoulder to lower right)
3. Step back with the left foot, rotate the blade around on the outside of your body and cut another quarter cut, this time with both hands, right shoulder to lower left.
4. Step back with the right foot and bring the sword around on the outside of your body to deliver a cut straight down.
5. Perform 3 alternating rakes, starting on the right side upward at the elbows of the opponent.
6. Cut down with a quarter cut (oberhau) from left shoulder to lower right.
7. Cut to a quarter cut while turning to your left (90 degrees)
8. Adjust right foot and turn to the right and cut down with a quarter cut (180 degrees)
9. Step back with your left foot and turn left to the center (90 degrees) while cutting straight down. You should now be facing the way you started in the boar guard (alber), right foot forward.
10. Standing still, perform 3 rising rakes starting on the right side (just like step 5). No footwork here.
11. Cut down with a quarter cut, left shoulder to lower right.
12. Cut to a quarter cut while turning to your left (90 degrees)
13. Adjust right foot and turn to the right and cut down with a quarter cut (180 degrees)
14. Step back with your left foot and turn left to the center (90 degrees) while cutting straight down. You should now be facing the way you started in the boar guard (alber), right foot forward.
15. Perform a quick cut around (a rabbit) so that you would end point forward on the left side of your opponent's sword in a bind and thrust (absetzen).

16. Drop the point and cut around on the other side (again, a rabbit as the target is the sword) so that you would end up on the right side of your opponent's sword in a bind. Thrust forward.
17. Drop the point and cut around with a rabbit to the left side and thrust again.
18. Drop the point and cut around with a rabbit to the right side and thrust again.
19. End standing with the point of your sword on the ground before you.

- The Second Flourish

A Quarter fair before you with one hand standing still. Set in the right leg with a Dragon's Tayle, then set the left hand upon the sword, smiting a Quarter fair before you. With one hand, turning your body, set in your right leg as forward as your left, bringing the point of the sword over your head, set it down softly before you upon the ground. Then, standing still, play your Rakes upon any side, as often as you will, resting upon your right arm then smite a Downright-stroke voiding back the left leg, bringing after the right leg with a Rake. Lift up the sword, over your head, bringing forward the right leg as forward as the left, play a Broken thrust upon any side. Turning the sword over the right arm, setting the point softly before you on the ground.

1. Start with your left leg forward. Cut around from left shoulder to lower right with a one handed (right hand) quarter cut (oberhau).
2. Move the sword to dragon's tail (Posta de coda lunga)
3. Hold the sword in two hands and bring the sword up and cut down from right shoulder to lower left with a quarter cut (oberhau) while stepping forward with the right foot.
4. Bring the sword above your head and cut down the boar's guard (alber) while stepping forward with the left foot.
5. Play 3 upward rakes alternating sides (I start on the right)
6. Cut down with a cut while voiding the left leg (pass back with the left foot).
7. Cut upward with a rake while voiding the right foot (pass back), you should be in Roebuck (ochs) with the left foot forward.
8. Step forward with the right foot as you thrust into where your opponent's sword would be so that you would end up in a bind and continue your thrust forward with structure (absetzen).
9. Stand with the point of the sword on the ground before you.

- Laying Down of the Sword

A Proffer to his face, following in with the right leg with a rake. Standing still smite a Quarter fair before you with another after voiding back the right leg. Then smite a Down-right stroke voiding back the left leg, with a Rake following in with the

right leg. Lifting up your hands on your right shoulder, turning again set in your right leg before your left, softly lay down your sword

1. Thrust to the face
2. Step forward with right leg and turn the sword around to cut upwards (rake)
3. You should be on the left roebuck
4. Execute a quarter cut downward while stepping back with your right foot.
5. Execute a quarter cut downward to the left while stepping back with your left foot.
6. Execute a rake while making a simple step forward with your right foot leading.
7. You should be in a point forward high guard on your right side with your right foot forward.
8. Lay down the point of your sword in front of you

Chases (My interpretations with help from sources)

- First (very similar to zornhau ort)
 - When your opponent strikes with a hawk or quarter cut, cut over their sword with your own to deflect their sword to the ground
 - Perform a foin (thrust) to an upper opening
 - If the thrust is blocked, cut to the other side once contact is made (abnehmen)
- Second
 - Execute a double round cut, passing forward with the first cut.
 - Execute a void foin passing back.
 - Execute a quarter cut to your opponent (assumes they displaced your thrust)
- Third
 - Double cut forward while passing forward
 - Double cut while passing backward
 - Void cut with the left leg
 - Void foin with the right leg
 - Void cut with the left leg
- Fourth (Bound Foin)
 - Double cut forward while passing forward
 - Double cut while passing backward
 - Void cut with the left leg
 - Void foin with the right leg keeping in the bind (broken foin)
 - Snatch, displace and cut (schnappen) while stepping to maintain measure
- Fifth (at the rounds)
 - Double cut forward while passing forward
 - Double cut while passing backward, Note that these are specifically counter cuts to the original cuts
- Sixth (tumbling chase)
 - Double cut forward with two passing steps, should end with left foot forward.

- Quarter cut with passing step (right foot passes)
- Void cut
- Void foin
- Counter cut any displacement with a rising cut to your opponent
- Seventh
 - From hawk, deliver a displacing stroke while passing back with the left foot
 - Simple step and deliver a foin
 - Delivery a quarter stroke (as if your foin was blocked) from left to right, no footwork. This is a cut to long point.
 - Pass forward with the left foot to deliver a broken foin.
 - Pass back and delivery a voiding broken foin on the other side
 - Thrust forward with a foin
 - Perform a quarter stroke to long point and thrust with a broken foin
 - Perform a quarter stroke to long point and thrust with a broken foin on the other side.
 - Perform a foin to the face
 - Perform a voiding quarter cut while passing back
 - Perform a second voiding quarter cut while passing back
- Eighth (spring) (this seems to be directed against an aggressive opponent)
 - Start in hawk
 - Delivery a quarter stroke with passing step (right foot)
 - Simple step with foin
 - Pass forward with left foot while executing a spring, a one handed off hand thrust holding the sword near the pommel for max range. (In testing, we are awful close for this to work, possible that this is offline?)
 - Voiding quarter cut, passing back with the left leg.
 - Voiding Foin (right leg passes back)
 - Spring again (no foot work as left foot should already be forward)
 - Voiding quarter cut, passing back with the left leg.
 - Pass back and execute a double foin
 - Spring again, then pass back with the left leg
 - Move to hawk
 - Simple step and perform a quarter cut.
 - Perform a double foin
 - Pass back the right foot while performing a spring cut to the knee (das gayszlen)
 - Voiding cut (passing back)
 - Voiding foin
- Ninth (four points)
 - Voiding quarter stroke, passing back with the left leg
 - Cut with a rake to the hands or arms (no footwork)
 - Cut with a full quarter stroke (no footwork)
 - Step far to the left with a passing step and cut with a false edge cut to the arms. (like an außer nym with zwerchau cut)

- Tenth (two points)
 - Voiding quarter stroke, passing back with the left leg
 - Cut with a rake to the hands or arms with passing step forward
 - Voiding quarter stroke, passing back the left leg
 - Voiding foin, pass back the right leg
 - Simple step with the left foot and cut a quarter stroke
- Eleventh (three points)
 - Pass forward with the right foot with a rake to the right. This is a cut to the sword or arms of an attacking opponent
 - Cut around with a quarter stroke to the other side (no footwork)
 - Voiding quarter stroke, passing back the right leg
- Twelfth (the points)
 - Voiding quarter stroke, passing back with the left leg
 - Simple step with the right foot, perform a rake to the opponent
 - Voiding quarter stroke, passing back with the right leg
- Thirteenth (getting chase) against two opponents
 - Quarter cut, passing with the right leg
 - Pull back the point, foin to the face (no footwork)
 - Voiding step back with the right leg, rake to the arms
 - Spring to the second opponent
 - Quarter cut to the second opponent with a passing step with the left foot
 - Pass forward with the right foot, rake to the arms (unter abschneiden), you are moving your opponents apart
 - Quarter stroke while turning on balls of the feet back to the first opponent, pass forward with the right foot.
 - Cut quickly to the other side without moving feet
 - Quarter cut

Original Source Material

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