Précis: "High Heels & Hokum: The Demi-Pointe Lunge in Historical Fencing"

This is a short transcription of a paper/lecture I delivered 6 April 2021 via Google Meet for Sala della Spada, Carlisle, PA, USA, the school run by my good friend Dr. Patrick Bratton. It was a brief look at research for an article I've been working on during the pandemic, and concerns an aberrant version of the lunge sometimes used in historical fencing. Often referred to as the "Renaissance" or "Rapier Lunge," adherents land on the balls of the front foot; I have chosen to call it the *demi-pointe* lunge after the ballet term since this is more specific as to foot placement, and, is a nod to major source cited as support by demi-pointe lungers, period dance.

So far, I've examined some 70 different treatises, from Agrippa's *Trattato di Scienzia d'Armes* (1553) to Maitre Robert Handleman's *Fencing Foil* (2014)—not one of them suggests that a fencer should ever land on the balls of the foot when lunging. This examination also covers other sources of support cited by demi-pointe fencers, including early modern dance, works on deportment and oratory, equitation, as well as exploring the question about footwear of the time, especially the heeled shoe, and whether or not it demanded a different method of comportment.

My preliminary conclusion is that the demi-pointe lunge is modern; it emerged in the late 1990s/early 2000s, most likely among early researchers in the SCA (Society for Creative Anachronism) working on rapier texts. Cross-fertilization between the SCA, the burgeoning historical martial arts movement (HACA, ARMA, and more recently HEMA), and the influx of disaffected former Olympic fencers combined a wish to differentiate what they were doing from Olympic practice with misinterpretation of these rapier works to produce this ahistorical lunge. It has persisted thanks to several factors: the internet, which allows information to travel widely and quickly and so much of which lacks any editorial or fact-checking oversight; the continued influence of early interpretations which the first generation of historical fencers devised, and which in a very short time have created "micro-lineages" with students who continue to teach it; and a mix of poor interpretation and dismissal of any critical use of modern understanding of fencing universals in the mistaken belief that these are divorced from the past.

Though hardly likely to take-over traditional practice and technique, there are several reasons to examine and avoid this lunge. First, while it's true that the injuries incurred are different than those typical of the heel-toe or flat-footed lunge, the chances of pitching forward have been recognized at least as early as 1670 when Philibert, Sieur de la Touche recommended one not land on the toes because "you will be in danger of falling on your nose" (*True Principles of the Single Sword*, 51). Second, for historical fencers who ostensibly look to period sources, using a lunge at variance with the corpus makes no real sense. Lastly, this example highlights the challenges and potential pitfalls that HEMA so often struggles with in terms of research, among which overreliance on and misinterpretation of images, poor translation, and poor reasoning loom most large.

I support open source and free access to scholarship, but do ask that you cite me should you use any of the material here:

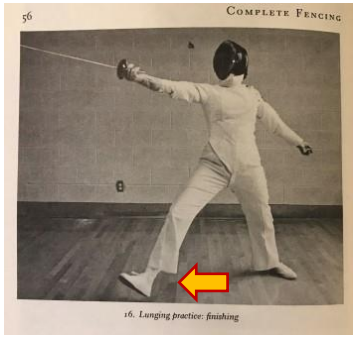
Jim BT Emmons, “High Heels & Hokum: The *Demi-Pointe* Lunge in Historial Fencing,” 7 April 2021, Google Meet Lecture, Sala della Spada, Carlisle, PA, USA

Good evening, it’s an honor to be here and share a little of the work I’ve been engaged in over the past year. My thanks to Patrick for hosting and for inviting me to speak about a curious variant of the lunge tonight. My thanks to all of you for taking time to join me.

There is much we can take for granted as fencers, even the most fundamental aspects of our art. We can assume that something once learned is something we know and do well. With the lunge, for example, once learned a lunge is a lunge, right? Well, there is an aberrant version of the lunge in the community that while unlikely to supplant the traditional one has proved tenacious. Often called either the “Rapier Lunge” or “Renaissance Lunge,” fencers who employ it maintain that one’s lead foot lands not heel-toe or flat, but on the balls of the foot. I prefer the term demi-pointe lunge, which I’ve borrowed from ballet, as it is more specific as to the key issue, how we land, but also because it’s also a nod to a major source of support cited by demi-pointe lungers, period dance. My focus tonight will be smallsword, so the examples from treatises will mostly reflect this material.

Now, why does this matter?

Traditional vs. Demi-Pointe Lunge



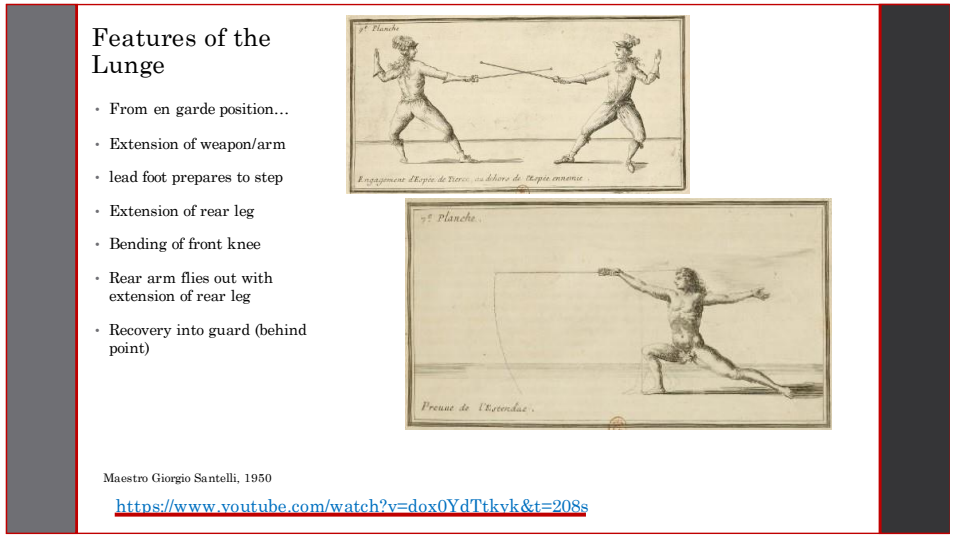
Lifts toes, skims floor; set up to land well

Demi-Pointe (lands on balls of the foot)

sur les demi-pointes
On the half-points. Indicates that the dancer is to stand high on the balls of the feet and under part of the toes. Also used in the singular, "sur la demi-pointe."
[Ballet Dictionary, Amer. Ballet Theatre]

There are several reasons I believe this matters. First, it is easy to take our technical repertoire for granted, so it's worth our time to revisit these fundamentals and ensure we are correct. This is especially important for us instructors—we should be able to explain each aspect of a technique and why we do it the way we do. The lunge, after all, is a complicated combination of actions, all of which take place within specified distances and tempi, and incorporate movement and decision making simultaneously. A poor interpretation of it has implications, from safety to transmitting erroneous information, the first of which we should observe and the second prevent.

HEMA in some ways is like the "Wild West." What is popular or has consensus can overrule both reason and the source tradition. This makes no real sense. This is to say that confirmation bias and the Duning-Kreuger effect do much to undermine our collective success—if "historical" fencing rejects the methodology best suited to approach these sources, and if that is not of concern to us, then what are we doing? If we invent technique unsupported by our treatises then we engage more in live-action role play than historical fencing. To be fair, poor fencing exists in every branch of the Art, in Olympic, theater, the SCA, and historical. There is a difference, however, between an off day or honest mistake and persisting to teach an idea patently false and ahistorical.



So what is a proper lunge? I've selected two examples, the first is Plate 7 from Philibert, Sieur de la Touche's *True Principles of the Single Sword* (1670), and a short clip of Maestro Giorgio Santelli teaching the lunge in an instructional film from 1950. From the en garde position, which we see in the first image, the lead foot points to the opponent, the rear either perpendicular to that line (the line of direction) or at an angle to the inside line; in many smallsword texts the weight is on the rear leg, as here, and the weapon is forward, aimed at the opponent; the rear arm is either up and behind one as here, or in some cases, held at the chin or chest to assist in defense. To lunge, one extends the weapon first, the lead foot prepares to step by lifting the toes, and the rear leg, pushing us forward, forces us to bend the front knee and kick out with the lead foot, the heel skimming the ground, coming to rest with the knee over the heel (or over the toes in some sources). Ideally the weapon hits just prior to the front foot setting down. The rear foot is usually flat and immobile, though in some smallsword texts the rear foot rolls onto the arch, almost universally a no-no today.

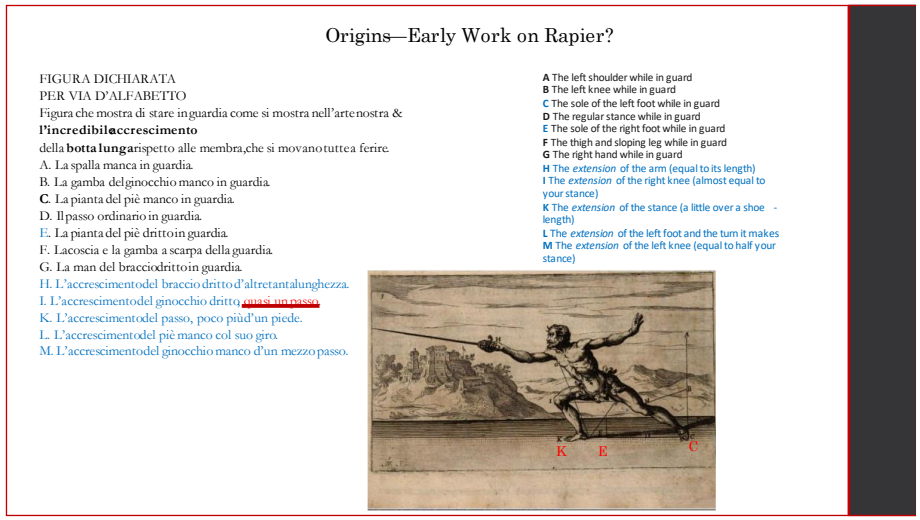
If this is the lunge derived from the source tradition, then where, when, and how did the demi-pointe lunge develop? Examining the origins of this curious practice has so far proved the most difficult aspect of the project. The evidence I've found so far suggests that it emerged in the late 1990s, early 2000s, but tracing a practice that was largely taught in person and spread by word of mouth is difficult. Most people with whom I've chatted and from what I've been able to find point to the SCA. Early work in interpreting rapier manuals, such as Capo Ferro's *Great Representation of the Art and Use of Fencing* (1610 CE), is one candidate. A few hints of this early work exist here and there.

One example is William Wilson's page at Northern Arizona University, where his piece on the "Renaissance lunge" resides. According to visiospark.com, an online method of checking when a web page was last modified, this page dates to at least 2005. This date is, of course, an extremely unreliable one even as a *terminus ante quem*, but it does accord generally with the testimony of the fencers with whom I have discussed this puzzle. Wilson advocates the same demi-pointe lunge in his 2013 *The Arte of Defense*. In the introduction on the website he cites earlier work with Bob Charron and others:

> where earlier footwork was discussed and it was determined that much of the footwork was done on the balls of the feet. This lead me to the conclusion that even at 1600 mand [sic] later the balls of the feet would be used and it was not until the classical fencing period that the heel would have been used.

In the early days of WMA (Western Martial Arts) there was significant cross-over with the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA) as well as the exodus of Olympic fencers disaffected with the state of competition in the 1990s. Many fencers, Wilson among them, have a foot in multiple arenas of sword study. How the idea came about, so far as I can determine, was a mix of misinterpretation and a desire to distinguish what these fencers were doing from others, chiefly Olympic fencing. If you weren't fencing in the 1980s or 90s I can tell you

that some of the rule changes created a minor exodus of fencers from the sport. I was one of them. It's possible that the disappointment and chagrin, especially as so few within the sport cared about the issues, helped fuel the interpretation, but I can't prove that.



Capo Ferro is one early text that adherents of the demi-pointe lunge pointed out to me. To illustrate one example of the perils in interpretation, here is what Capo Ferro says of his lunge. I've highlighted points H through M as they denote motion into the lunge versus the guard position (A-G). Nowhere here does the master say step onto the toes or balls of the feet, and nothing here suggests one should.

I and K are significant. Extending the knee "almost equal to your stance" suggests more a kick than a lift up, and K recommends a step over a "little over a shoe-length." The distance from E to K, even only going with the image, is not long. The Italian text is much the same:

FIGURA DICHIARATA
PER VIA D'ALFABETTO
Figura che mostra di stare in guardia come si mostra nell'arte nostra & l'incredibile accrescimento
della botta lunga rispetto alle membra, che si movano tutte a ferire.
A. La spalla manca in guardia.
B. La gamba del ginocchio manco in guardia.
C. La pianta del piè manco in guardia.
D. Il passo ordinario in guardia.

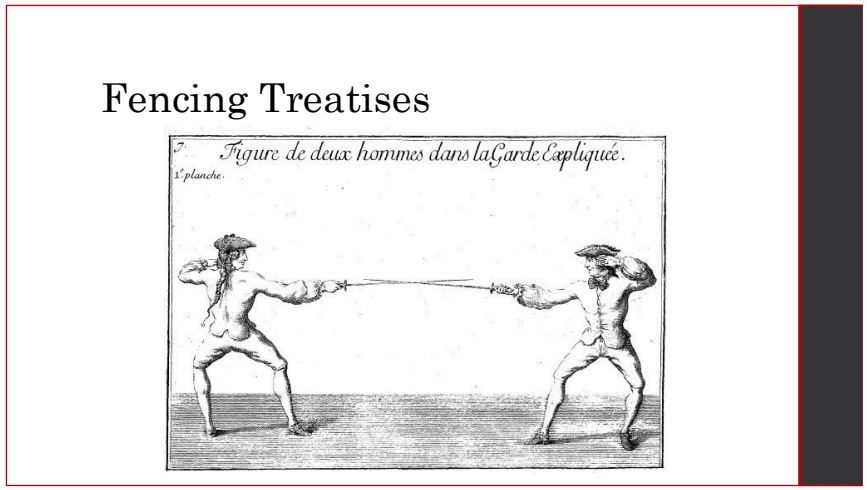
E. La pianta del piè dritto in guardia.
F. La coscia e la gamba a scarpa della guardia.
G. La man del braccio dritto in guardia.
H. L'accrescimento del braccio dritto d'altretanta lunghezza.
I. L'accrescimento del ginocchio dritto, quasi un passo.
K. L'accrescimento del passo, poco più d'un piede.
L. L'accrescimento del piè manco col suo giro.
M. L'accrescimento del ginocchio manco d'un mezzo passo.

The step one makes from E to K is extremely small, and one could step onto the toes, but why? We don't do this naturally and Capo Ferro's use of step, *passo*, doesn't suggest it either.

What sources do fans of the demi-pointe lunge use, and, what if anything do smallsword and related works say about it? There are four chief topics that adoptees of the demi-pointe lunge rely upon:

1) The first extant sword treatises (especially images).
2) Works on period dance
3) Books concerned with deportment and rhetoric
4) and lastly Shoes & Locomotion
5)* I added equitation to the study, but do not cover it here

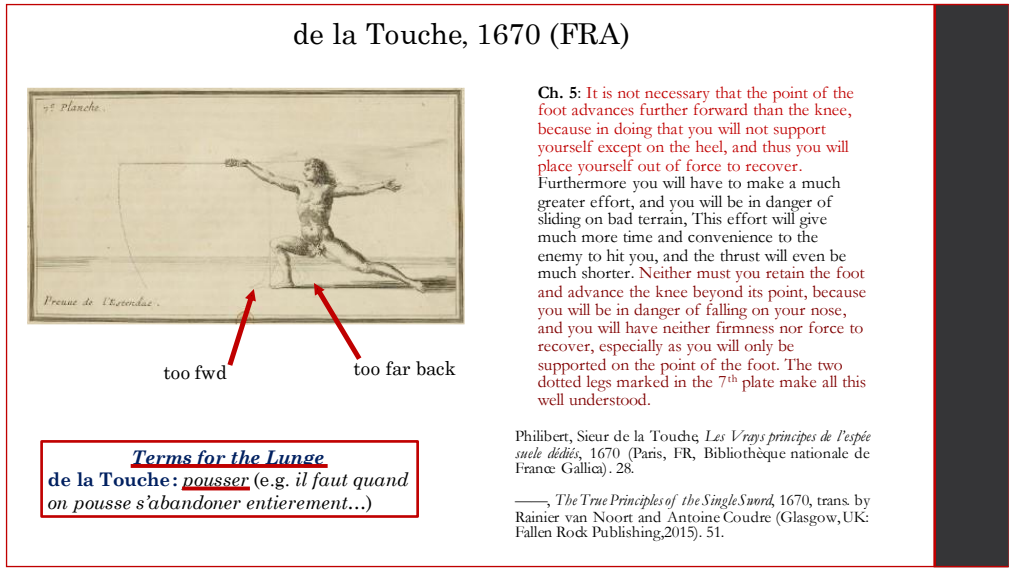
To explore each of these in great depth would take a long time, more than we have today, so I will limit myself to a few prime examples from each. Let's start with fencing treatises. Again, in the interests of time I'm focusing here on smallsword, though I should add that none of the rapier or late period works suggest a demi-pointe lunge either.



Few works on smallsword are super specific about how one steps into the lunge. Most discuss the advance or stepping and use verbs that one might expect, e.g. *avancer le pied droit de deux semelles*; this applies to the lunge as well, though there may be additional words, such as *tirer/tirar*; *stoccata/estocada*; "push;" *la botte*; *longe* or *elonge*, etc. that explain what one is doing with this specific step.

Arguments from silence require caution, but the fact that so many masters did not provide detail about the exact way the front foot should land is suggestive. This is to say that where they wished a student to move unnaturally, they usually say so. It is clear that the masters assumed one knew how to take a step.

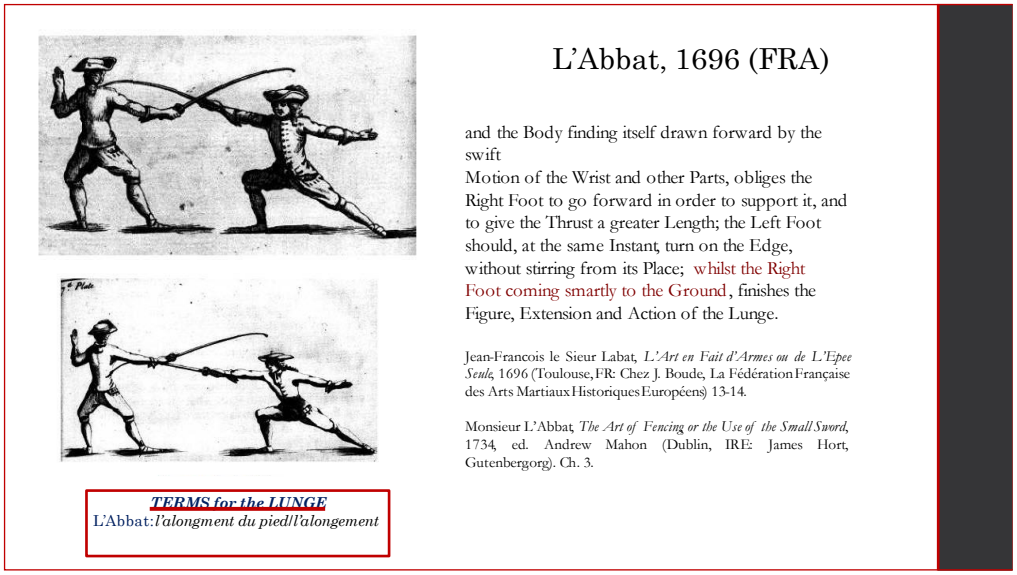
So far, I've examined about 72 separate works, from Camillo Agrippa (1553) to Handelman's *Foil Fencing* (2104); I've so far read works in French, Italian, Spanish, German, English, and one so far in Portuguese. What started as a smallsword project has somewhat mushroomed into one covering broadsword and sabre as well as the modern weapons. I have used translations when possible, but in each case I have compared them against the original language wherever possible because many translations, particularly for French works, are… not great. Some works, alas, I have yet to locate and read, but the search continues. I would like to share a few of these with you today for what they tell us of the lunge.



De La Touche, 1670 (FRA) This image, Plate 7 from De La Touche, which we saw earlier when discussing the mechanics of the lunge, was employed by one of my respondents as proof for the toe-tapping lunge. He pointed out the dotted lines of the lower leg on the balls of the feet, but must not have read the text as the master makes it clear what these dotted lines refer to:

> Ch. 5: It is not necessary that the point of the foot advances further forward than the knee, because in doing that you will not support yourself except on the heel, and thus you will place yourself out of force to recover. Furthermore you will have to make a much greater effort, and you will be in danger of sliding on bad terrain, This effort will give much more time and convenience to the enemy to hit you, and the thrust will even be much shorter. Neither must you retain the foot and advance the knee beyond its point, because you will be in danger of falling on your nose, and you will have neither firmness nor force to recover, especially as you will only be supported on the point of the foot. The two dotted legs marked in the 7th plate make all this well understood.

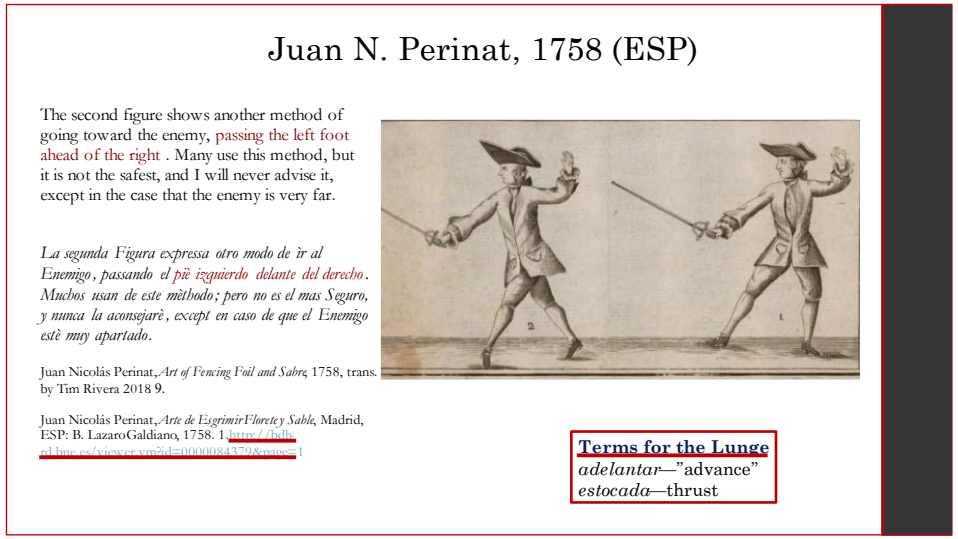
This example highlights a major problem within "HEMA," namely over-reliance on images as well as using them out of context.



L'Abbat (1696/1734) *The Art of Fencing*, Ch. 3 (in the French 13-14) Much of the lunge (which he refers to as *de l'alongment du pied* or *de l'alongment*) is the same, but he touches on the front foot as well:

> and the Body finding itself drawn forward by the swift Motion of the Wrist and other Parts, obliges the Right Foot to go forward in order to support it, and to give the Thrust a greater Length; the Left Foot should, at the same Instant, turn on the Edge, without stirring from its Place; whilst the Right Foot coming smartly to the Ground, finishes the Figure, Extension and Action of the Lunge.

Having the front foot land "smartly to the Ground" suggests either a flat step or landing heel-toe. The illustration of the lunge supports this too—the front knee is only slightly over the heel, but L'Abbat is clear that it is meant to be perpendicular.



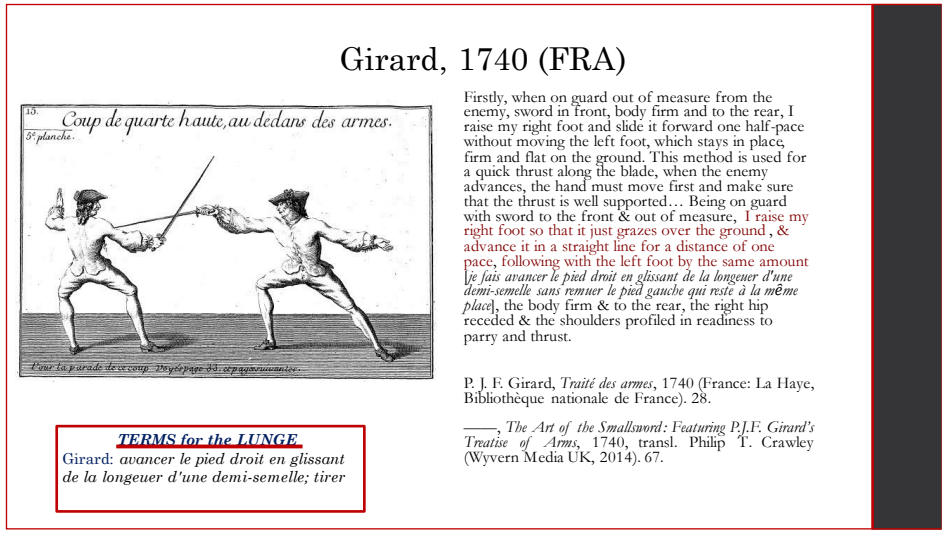
Juan N. Perinat 1758 (ESP) This image is from a Spanish source, Perinat, and was also shared with me as another supposed proof for landing toe-first. Note, this fencer is making a pass, not a lunge, but this was again an image one of my respondents shared with me.

Looked at as if a photograph one might conclude that the fencer standing over the number 2 is tip-toeing his way forward.

It is unwise to apply modern notions of photo-realism and to images from the past as if the audience *then* shared our approach to the visual. Even now we have learned that one can manipulate supposedly realistic photographs… As with de la Touche the text should temper the interpretation of what one sees:

> The second figure shows another method of going toward the enemy, passing the left foot ahead of the right. Many use this method, but it is not the safest, and I will never advise it, except in the case that the enemy is very far

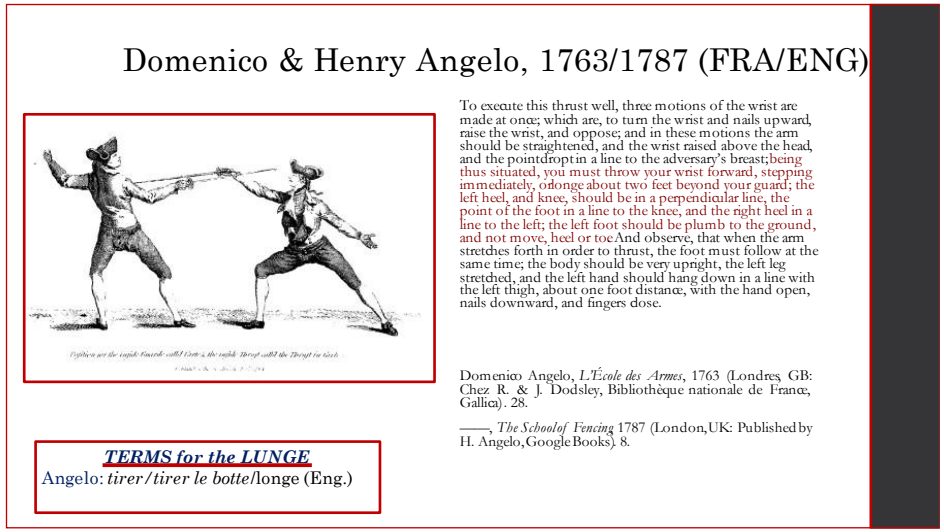
What we see then is not a man walking on his toes but a *representation* of someone making a cross-step. Representation is one issue, but so too is an artist's skill and style—here, for me at least, this is a charming image, but the proportions are off, and the attempt to capture movement is rather more wooden than graceful. It is meant as short-hand, a reference to go with the text, not as a realistic one-to-one model.



Girard (*and de St. Martin (1804)*) Girard, and later de St. Martin (1804) refers to the lead foot as barely touching the ground as it moves forward. The word he uses in the original French is *glissant* from *glisser*, "to glide or slide."

> Firstly, when on guard out of measure from the enemy, sword in front, body firm and to the rear, I raise my right foot and slide it forward one half-pace without moving the left foot, which stays in place, firm and flat on the ground. This method is used for a quick thrust along the blade, when the enemy advances, the hand must move first and make sure that the thrust is well supported… Being on guard with sword to the front & out of measure, I raise my right foot so that it just grazes over the ground, & advance it in a straight line for a distance of one pace, following with the left foot by the same amount, the body firm & to the rear, the right hip receded & the shoulders profiled in readiness to parry and thrust.

Just grazing the ground suggests skimming with the heel, not the toe, as on uneven ground to skim demi-pointe might more easily lead to tripping.



Domenico & Henry Angelo, *The School of Fencing* (1763/1787), 8, BnF 28. Henry Angelo, Domenico's son, uses the terms "thrust" and "longe" in the 1787 edition. These are close to the French terms Domenico employed, such as *avancer*, "to step" or "advance," *tirer* or *tirer le botte* for the "thrust." The description of the lunge, *per se*, is made with reference to the inside thrust in carte, the most important thrust and one the master believes one can never practice enough:

> To execute this thrust well, three motions of the wrist are made at once; which are, to turn the wrist and nails upward, raise the wrist, and oppose; and in these motions the arm should be straightened, and the wrist raised above the head, and the point dropt in a line to the adversary's breast; being thus situated, you must throw your wrist forward, stepping immediately, or longe about two feet beyond your guard; the left heel, and knee, should be in a perpendicular line, the point of the foot in a line to the knee, and the right heel in a line to the left; the left foot should be plumb to the ground, and not move, heel or toe. And observe, that when the arm stretches forth in order to thrust, the foot must follow at the same time; the body should be very upright, the left leg stretched, and the left hand should hang down in a line with the left thigh, about one foot distance, with the hand open, nails downward, and fingers close.

Angelo only specifies the orientation of the lead foot, not how it lands. The distance he recommends for this step (*avancer*), however, is two of the fencer's own feet out from guard, so the lead foot does not move all that far (*avancer le pied droit de deux semelles*).

J. Olivier, Angelo, and de Liancour all specify that the length of a step should be a shoe-sole (*semelles*) as well.

Dance, more than any other pursuit, is cited by advocates of the demi-pointe lunge for support, and with some reason. Of related genteel pursuits dance has perhaps more connections with fencing than any other. One reason is that there were masters often involved in dancing as well as fencing, the stand-out example for the smallsword era perhaps being Domenico Angelo, but there were earlier masters.

The late Patri J. Pugliese pointed out two from Milanese

- Giovanni Ambrosio Valchiera
- Giovanni Battista Varade
- both of whom Cesare Negri mentions in *Le Gratie d'Amore* (1602) and both of whom were masters of fencing and dance

This connection between fencing and dancing has long been recognized, and Pugliese is, within historical fencing, one of the earliest, most thorough scholars to frame the questions we are still exploring.

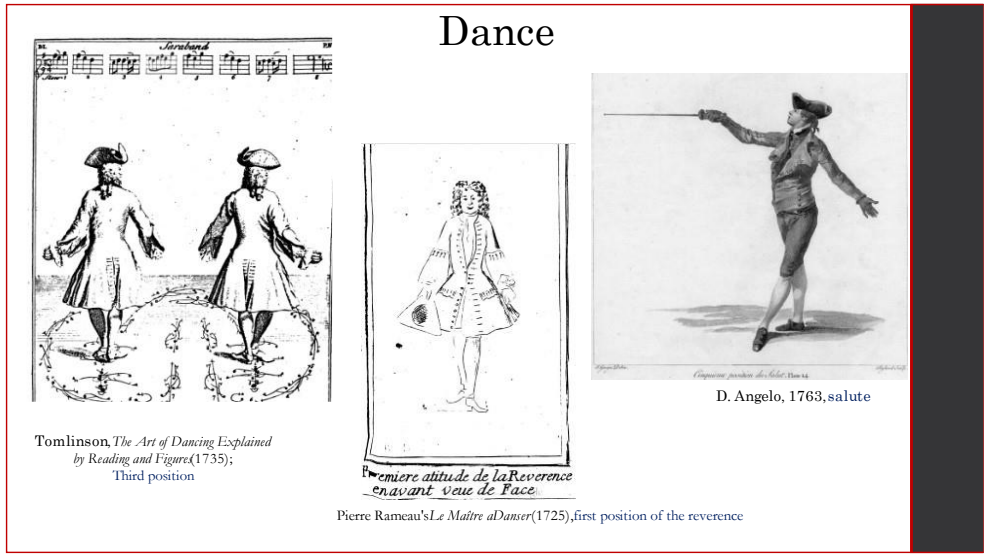
However, while we see instances of masters expert in both fields, this does not mean that there was extensive overlap in movement.

Taking the evidence for applying movement in one endeavor to the other first, what do we know? Pugliese again provides a fantastic example. In discussing this very topic he wrote

A straight forward example of this is a dance step in Feuillet's contradance "le Pistolet" from his *Recüeil de Contredances* (Paris, 1706). The step is described in an introductory section translated by John Essex as follows: "To walk one step forward and stamp the ground with the flat of the foot as in fencing." Feuillet's original description of the step reads: "Marcher un pas en avant et fraper le plat du pied a terre en le posant comme si on poussoit un estocade." That is, one is not merely to walk forward a step as in fencing, but rather one is to take a step forward as if one would make a thrust. The intended motion is clearly that of a fencing lunge, which is consistent with Feuillet's symbol which indicates that the right foot is advanced and lands with a slap or stamp to the ground (indicated by the extra tick mark).

Feuillet and Essex are one of several examples he cites. He also mentions a dance in Thoinot Arbeau's *Orchesography* (1589), the "Bouffons" (or "Mattachins"), a type of sword-dance with moves named for then-common fencing terms (e.g. *estocade* [thrust], *taille* [cut], *feicte* [feint]).

Pugliese also noted a similarity between the fencing hall illustrated in the works on dance by both Cesare Negri (d. ca. 1605) and Fabritio Caroso (fl. 1575) and the checkerboard floor upon which Achille Marozzo's fencer in Figure 19 stands. It's possible that this similarity in flooring indicates some connection, but it seems more likely that these authors were observing a common trend in artistic representation. To name just one example, in the bottom right corner we see Sebastain Serlio's Setting for Tragedy" (1545) and similar floor design.



Tomlinson, *The Art of Dancing Explained by Reading and Figures* (1735); Third position

D. Angelo, 1763, salute

Pierre Rameau's *Le Maître a Danser* (1725), first position of the reverence

A fourth example and an important master in the period under study here is **Domenico Angelo**. Though he did not write a book on dancing, his article about fencing for Diderot's *L'Encyclopédie* (Vol. 21, 1765) includes figures Pugliese found closely paralleled in Pierre Rameau's *Le Maître a Danser* (1725), particularly in the former's salute and the latter's *reverence*.

To the evidence Pugliese cited I would like to add another, this time, a similarity between Kellom Tomlinson's discussion of "third position" in *The Art of Dancing Explained by Reading and Figures* (1735) and John McArthur's *The Army and Navy Gentleman's Companion* (1780). McArthur draws a direct comparison with dance in describing the initial position of the feet before taking guard; he writes

> Having hold of your sword or foil in this manner, and standing upon your first position, which is similar to what is called the third position in dancing; that is, your right foot before the left, with the heel advanced near the buckle, throw yourself upon the common guard of carte, by advancing your right foot about the distance of a measured foot and a half from the left, or at the distance of two lengths of your own foot from the heel of the other – the two heels should be in the same straight line.

Knowing his readers will likely be familiar with popular positions in dance, McArthur draws a parallel between the way a fencer stands before taking guard and one, specific position in dance. Both in their own ways are methods of standing before action commences. This said, McArthur leaves the parallel there.

That there were explicit connections between fencing and dance, particularly with regard to stance or the terms for individual steps, is undeniable. This said, one question Pugliese bequeathed to us and which I attempt to address here is to what degree these two fields *directly* influenced how practitioners in each *moved*.

In my reading, what unites the *Gaillarde* and *l'epée* of the 17th and 18th centuries was a community concerned with refinement, both for its own sake as well as a badge identifying the individual as belonging to elite society. The connection was *not* a shared corpus of movement however superficially similar.

It is not an accident that the *reverenc*e one offered before a dance and the salute fencers tendered one another looked similar—both were methods by which this same community showed respect before engaging in social behaviors in some ways unique to their position. However, the gentleman about to make a *pas de Sissone* at court and the nervous man in the field about to fight a duel, once that initial performance of respect was made, set about moving differently. It is not just terrain, but purpose. That same duelist may have been an excellent dancer and may have moved with more grace than his opponent, but the footwork he relied on was far simpler, circumspect, and executed in shorter compass than the dancer. They were in completely different head-spaces as we might say today.

Put another way, while dancing may have influenced how a fencer moved and vice versa, that is not the same thing as the respective fields *sharing* as a system of movement. Pugliese anticipated this notion and makes much the same conclusion:

> A more general argument for the parallel study of fencing and dancing is that in many periods, the same gentlemen who would be learning the one activity, would also be receiving daily instruction in the other. If the movement styles in these two activities were grossly different, these gentlemen would be faced with the huge challenge of changing the basic kinesthetic elements of how they move. It is difficult to imagine that the strength, sense of distance, timing, balance, overall posture and style of movement acquired with sword in hand would not affect the same gentleman's posture and movement style on the dance floor.

It is extremely likely that dance and fencing imparted a certain refinement in a man's movement; they do today. Long study, frequent opportunities to practice, and the social need to do well while looking both nonchalant and as natural as possible were all important motivators.

Rev. Gilbert Austin, *Chironomia: Or a Treatise on Rhetorical Delivery*, 1806

Francis Nivelon, *The Rudiments of Genteel Behavior*, 1737

Fans of the demi-pointe lunge argue that there was also an intimate connection between fencing and the poise necessary in public oratory.

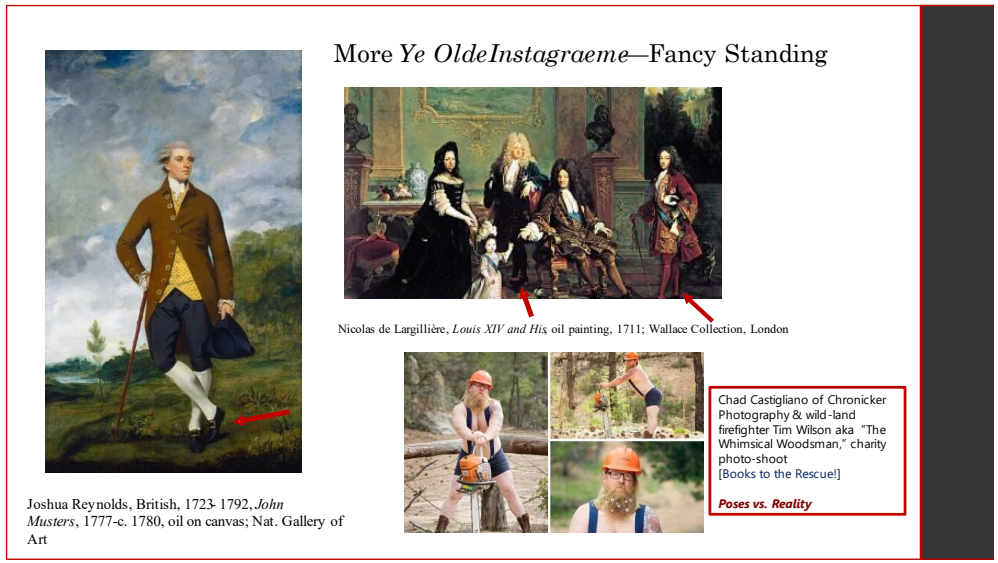
In part this is true. Elite members of society (and those who wished to become such elites) had a general concern for deportment, manners, and expressing oneself with grace in all things. This concern for etiquette and conformity with class *mores* permeated life and is reflected in literature of the time, from Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1747/1748) to the novels of Jane Austen.

Portraiture too reveals this concern for stance and decorum. Acknowledgement of the role of fencing instruction in all this is a valuable insight into the context in which many fencers learned the Art and how they viewed their roles in society. After all, the connection between politeness and poise, signs of a "superior" individual, are impossible to separate from the concept of honor over which so many swordsmen found themselves called upon to use their hard-earned skills.

Francis Nivelon, in a short work entitled *The Rudiments of Genteel Behavior* (1737), describes how to stand, bow or curtsy, as well as key positions for dance. In walking, one should ensure that the step

be in Proportion to the Height, the Leg that moves foremost must come to the Ground with a strait knee, and the Body will insensibly move to that and leave the other Leg light and free to pass forward in like Manner, at which Time, looking with decent Humility, and a submissive Air, the Courtsie in passing by may be properly made by joining the backward Foot to that which is foremost, and sinking and rising gradually, then Walk as before.

Specific as this is, Nivelon goes on to explain that unless one can walk in this fashion that any other "genteel Action or Exercise" will fail. One's deportment, how one stands and walks, required practice to be natural; proper poise was a way to announce, at first glance, that one had proper breeding. The earlier one started this education, the better.



Deportment Public and Private

It will surprise no one that experts in other branches of the refined arts felt equally sure that their tuition was transformative.

Looking to another source, one on oratory that some promoters of the demi-pointe lunge cite, we see this vividly. The Reverend Gilbert Austin in his *Chironomia* covers all aspects of oratory, from how to stand and walk to how to use the hands in expressing oneself so to reach those more distant in an audience. In chapter 11, "Of the Position of the Feet and Lower Limbs," Austin makes a distinction between brutes and those who have ingested the culture of grace:

> As the object of the orator is to persuade, and as prejudice against his person or manners may greatly impede him… he must recommend himself by every attention to his external deportment, which may be deemed correct and proper; and guard against every species of inelegance that may prove disadvantageous. He must therefore, even in his position as he stands, prefer manly dignity and grace, to awkward rusticity, or rude strength. Rude strength may suit him who wishes to terrify or insult; but his is rarely the purpose of a public speaker. Grace and decorum win favour; and this is the general object.

This theme continues with how one should stand:

> The body must be supported, if grace be consulted, on either limb, like the Apollo, the Antinous, or other beautiful and well executed statues.

The portraits here feature poses; they stand as Austin's statues do. This is not how people naturally move or stand. For an analogy today's Instagram is no different—models pose to produce an effect, not mirror reality. The lusty lumberjack here is parody, but captures the ridiculousness in some of these images. Like people in the 18th century with portraiture, we can simultaneously react to a photo and know that is staged.

Beyond the general interest in cultivating gentility, there were places where some degree of equivalence is clear. There is ample evidence of the importance of elegance in fencing. **Olivier**, to cite one example, is effusive in his belief that fencing can help shape a man into a gentleman. He writes

> It is the cultivation of this art that unfetters the Body, strengthens it, and makes it upright; it is it, that gives a becoming gait, and easy carriage, activity and agility, grace and dignity; it is it that opportunely awes petulance, softens and polishes savageness and rudeness; and animates a proper confidence; it is it which, in teaching us to conquer ourselves that we may be able to conquer others, imprints respect and gives true valour, good nature and politeness; in fine, which makes a man fit for society.

McArthur likewise sees the advantages that time foil in hand lends a man. For him,

> The just application of the Theory and Practice of this art, can never be viewed in a disadvantageous light by liberal minds. On the contrary, many advantages are derived from the proper cultivation thereof. For it not only inspires the possessor with confidence and animation, at the same time producing an easy and graceful manner; but, considered only as an exercise, it has the peculiar qualities over every other, of being conducive to the most agile motions, the most graceful attitudes, a bold and martial air, susceptibility of feeling, quickness of fight, and withal, is particularly conducive to the improvement of health and muscularity of body. The study of it, in a scientific manner, tends to constitute a powerful invention, a quick conception, a penetrating judgement, and lively imagination.

These florid encomia of fencing as a path-way to moving with grace indicate that the various polite arts *did* intersect more closely, but this was in terms of a culture of refinement rather than a unified approach to movement.

SHOES & LOCOMOTION

An additional argument for the demi-pointe lunge is based on shoes of the 17th and 18th century. As we see in treatises like that of de Liancour, many men wore heeled shoes and boots, and with such a shoe—the argument goes—a fencer was required to land on the balls of the foot when lunging.

But is this true? No, a heeled shoe does not debar one from landing either flat or heel-toe. In my own experiments a heel generally only means that the super long Olympic lunge of today is a bad idea. The length of lunge advocated in most texts, however, is shorter, and on slippery ground a shorter lunge is important regardless of shoe sole.

Though there may be several origins for this notion, one possibility is the work of Belinda Quirey (d. 1996). Mme. Ursula Hageli, in "Ballet Evolved—At the Court of Louis XIV," relates that Quirey surmised that the *turn-out* in ballet, where the dancer stands or walks with the feet pointed away from center from the hips, reportedly began with the musketeers. Large military boots, Quirey suggested, made walking normally difficult and so they began to walk with their feet at about a forty-five degree angle.

Dance historians have had a lot to say about the origins of ballet, especially before the reign of Louis XIV, and I leave that discussion to them. However, there is nothing in the "swashbuckling" military boot of the 17th century that requires one to walk in a different way.

The turn-out as a novel *a la mode* method of walking had more to do with fashion than footwear. As Hageli points out, Louis XIV was fond of his long legs and liked them to be seen; walking with the feet turned out was a way of displaying his legs to best effect. As the king leads, so the subjects follow. This said, dance training among aristocrats, never mind lessons in deportment, no doubt contributed to walking in as graceful a mode as possible.

Here we see two extant shoes of the time, a similar shoe one can see in one of de Liancour's plates—to these I added an example of fencing sandals as well. [Top left → MET Museum, Court shoes, France, ca. 1780-1800; MFA Boston, Shoes, likely Italian, ca. 1650-1700]

Moreover, fencers in the past wore a variety of shoes when training, not just the heeled dress shoe.

Jane Malcolm-Davies, in the stand-out work on the development of fencing kit, discussed the examples in two of the 17th century texts covered here. De la Touche, as she points out, depicts some fencers in flat shoes, others in heels. L'Abbat, likewise, has fencers outfitted in a practice shoe, in this case a sandal. Both sets of shoes have slight protrusions of leather at the toe, ostensibly to help magnify the sound and effect of the *appel*.

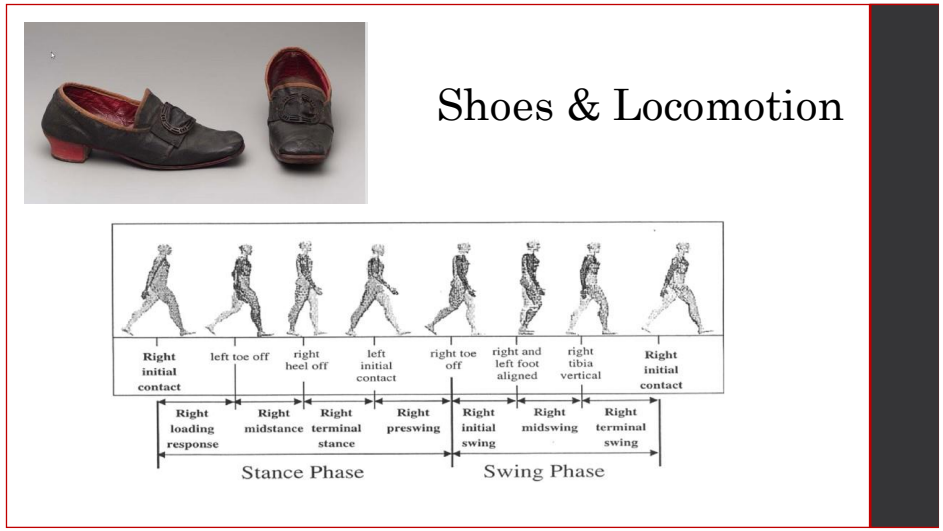
If no other argument is convincing, the fact that these shoes were designed to make the appel more effective should. This maneuver, where one slaps the front of the foot down to startle the opponent, does not work if one is on one's toes.

It suggests at the least the foot is flat if the heel is not the anchor, especially as to lunge immediately after the appel from the toe and landing on the toe would increase the chances of injury and falling.

Malcolm-Davies also covers the popularity of the pump, thin-soled shoes with little to no heel. As she points out

> Sir William Hope (1707) advised students to wear a pair of fencing shoes but 'nevertheless after at least six months tuition, the scholar might wear his ordinary clothes and walking shoes.' Hope gives no description of his fencing shoes but, since they are clearly different from outdoor shoes, it may be supposed that they are pumps of some kind.

They may well have been pumps (Mahon mentions refers to them as such in his translation of L'Abbat—the latter supplies *la sandale claque,* the use of *claque* is suggestive), but alas we cannot know for sure. What is clear is that Hope's students practiced in both "fencing" and street shoes. Regardless his method of movement could accommodate different styles of shoe and he clearly assumed that the type of footwear did not matter.



If we are to assume anything in all these works, given their collective silence about and lack of specificity in describing the way the front foot steps, it is that the fencer is to make that initial step much as one would *any* step, which is normally heel-toe.

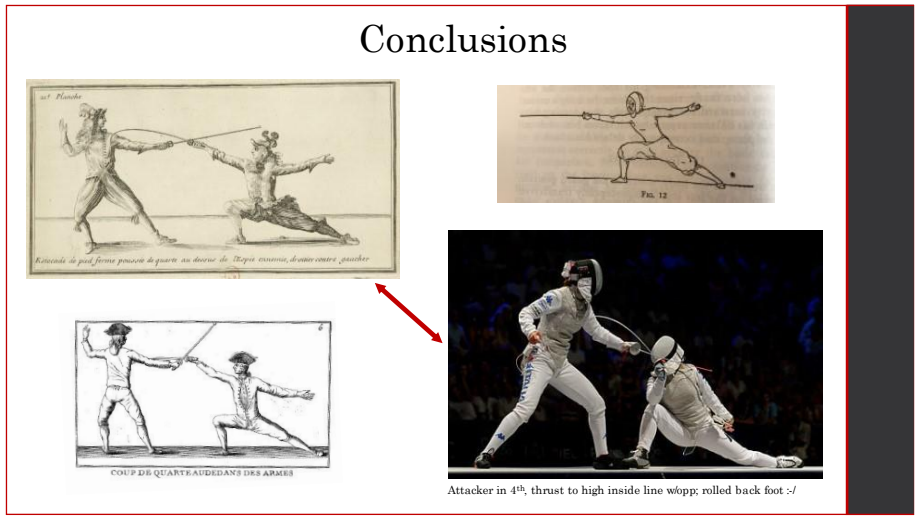
Normal human locomotion, sometimes referred to as "sagittal plane gait," consists of striking the ground heel first. This is followed by several phases from a shift in load to distinct motions in the swing of the leg as it goes to step, and then the pattern repeats.

This is not to say that humans only move this way; in dance and in many martial arts, for example one may be on the toes or the balls of the feet. We move differently in shoes than we often do when barefoot. More often than not we change how the foot lands depending upon the activity. Fencing is no exception.

Some of the modern studies on athletic footwear recommend a change in design for fencing shoes, but they also state that the difference between a flat-soled fencing shoe and a heeled-running shoe, while it might dampen the shock of the foot as it lands, was not as significant as they initially expected.

Researchers also discovered that fencers tend to favor the flat shoe as it conforms better to the kinematics of fencing, that is, facilitates the lunge as taught. A heeled shoe, for example, is less ideal for the longer lunge often employed today. The importance of this is that the lunge, historically, was often shorter, not only in order to keep one's footing on often unsuitable terrain, but also for reasons of safety.

A long lunge puts one more at risk, and in the days when our tools where sharp lunging too far and/or failing to put the weapon out first was likely to earn one a Cavalotti.



So what? What does this discussion add? What conclusions does this examination produce?

The **first** and most important conclusion is that we should not assume that fencers at any time in the past used the demi-pointe lunge. Taken together, the testimony of the representative fencing masters regarding how to step and lunge, the science about normative human locomotion, and a closer look at the role of footwear suggests that the normal heel-toe or flat-footed step were more likely used in the smallsword lunge. As these works were not created *ex nihil*, but looked to earlier practice, this suggests that earlier works and especially those for rapier likely didn't employ the demi-pointe lunge. [*note*: none of those I have so far examined do…]

If we are to assume anything we are on firmer ground assuming a normative practice over an exceptional one, especially when that normative practice is placed beside corroborating evidence Thus, while we cannot rule out the demi-pointe lunge, we should not conclude, given the evidence, that something extra-textual or perhaps mentioned once or twice was the norm either.

Second, context is everything in appreciating any historical examination. We are fortunate to possess the wide variety of sources we have for Early Modern fencing. Works on deportment, oratory, dance, or riding can help us get into the values and worldview of people of the time. We must, however, exercise caution in how we use these sources, paying attention not only to similarities, but also—and in this case more importantly—to *differences*.

Even though masters and students believed that one could improve deportment and poise via fencing, the requirements of a fencer were different than those of a dancer, orator, or rider.

Of particular importance here is how we analyze and use pictorial evidence in reconstruction of past fencing systems. There seems to be a consistent pattern in the use of images and how theories like this arise—there is too much focus on images and not enough on what the author says about them. How we read, and how *closely*, is important.

We must be careful in our use of these images and be sensitive to the nuances in how people over time have used and made sense of them.

Casting a wide, but *well-analyzed* net in research about historical fencing is important, because with few exceptions there is no one to ask for help. Most systems we study are extinct, their creators and practitioners long dead, or the tradition altered enough by time and context that we must be cautious in equating now with then. The gulf in time between us means that there is much we may get wrong; that is to be expected. It is one reason that we often turn to more recent iterations of swordplay and parallel combat systems from other regions.

Thus, a **third** conclusion is that for historical fencers who see little value in more recent and modern fencing, some revision of, or at least revisiting of, that position may be in order.

This month I debated this very point with another fencer *in re* George Silver. There is widespread belief that more recent iterations of fencing theory, because they're more modern, are divorced from the past—the fleche is a 20th cen. invention, no one used a flick, and any idiot who slapped with the flat at a sabre's bell-guard ate steel, but these are all creations of a game, *not* core aspects of theory.

These are modern, yes, but when it comes to universal principles we're still on firm ground. For its sins modern fencing still imparts these universals—the principles of distance, tempo, and judgment—better than anything else.

Whatever term or expression the masters covered here use, be it "lunge" or variants ("longe," "Elonging;" *de l'alongment du pied*, *de l'alongment*, or *l'allonge*), "advancing" (Fr. *avancer*; Esp. *adelantar*), "push," "thrust" (*l'estocade, tirar, tirer le botte*), they all describe what we today call a "lunge." A reader only realizes this, however, if that reader knows what a lunge is, if they understand what is being described regardless of *how* it is described (the mistake those wishing to revise Silver made as well).

Die-hard advocates of the demi-pointe lunge will likely continue to pursue the Art with their interpretation of the lunge.

Most fencers take their lessons and never have occasion to question them; they acquire skill over time and in good faith.

Even when confronted with evidence defeating a view those who hold it are more likely to entrench. I am unsure why this is, but it has something to do with how they approach evidence and assign authority. We can easily see what we want to see in the sources, not what is there, and nowhere in any branch of fencing is questioning an instructor normal, though in the case of HEMA it ought to be.

Regardless of sticklers, when any article of faith fails to hold up persistence in defending it makes little sense. Moliere's oft-quoted fencing master in "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme" remarked that in fencing it is best to give and not receive. Altering this excellent advice for research in historical fencing we need to keep in mind that it is not enough to receive teaching; we must also verify it.

Thank You.

Sources Mentioned

Domenico Angelo, *L'École des Armes*, 1763 (Londres, GB: Chez R. & J. Dodsley, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Gallica).

——, *The School of Fencing*, 1787 (London, UK: Published by H. Angelo, Google Books).

Rev. Gilbert Austin, *Chironomia*: *Or a Treatise on Rhetorical Delivery*, 1806 (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, Google Books).

Henry Blackwell, *The Gentleman's Tutor for the Small Sword, or, The Compleat English Fencing Master*, 1702/1730 (London, GB: J. Jackson, Archive.org.).

Capo Ferro, *Ridolfo Capoferro's The Art and Practice of Fencing: A Practical Translation for the Modern Swordsman*, 2011, trans. Tom Leoni (Wheaton, IL: Freelance Academy Press, 2011)

M. Feuillet, *Choregraphie ou L'Art de Decrire la Dance*, 2nd Ed., 1701 (Paris, FR: Chez l'Auteur, Google Books).

——, *Orchesography, or The Art of Dancing*, trans. John Weaver, 1706 (London, GB: Printed by H. Meere, Google Books).

P. J. F. Girard, *Traité des armes*, 1740 (France: La Haye, Bibliothèque nationale de France).

——, *The Art of the Smallsword: Featuring P.J.F. Girard's Treatise of Arms*, 1740, transl. Philip T. Crawley (Wyvern Media UK, 2014)

Sir William Hope, *A New, Short and Easy Method of Fencing: Or the Art of the Broad and Small-Sword Rectified and Compendiz'd*, 1701 (Edinburgh, SCT: James Watson, Google Books).

Jean-Francois le Sieur Labat, *L'Art en Fait d'Armes ou de L'Epee Seule*, 1696 (Toulouse, FR: Chez J. Boude, La Fédération Française des Arts Martiaux Historiques Européens)

Monsieur L'Abbat, *The Art of Fencing, or the Use of the Small Sword*, 1734, ed. Andrew Mahon (Dublin, IRE: James Hort, Gutenberg.org).
André le Sieur de Liancour, *Le Maitre d'Armes*, 1686, (Paris, FR: Chez l'Auteur, Bibliothèque nationale de France Gallica).

——, *The Master of Arms*, 1686, transl. Elise Darchis, "The Library," Linacre School of Defense, https://linacreschoolofdefence.org/Library/Liancour/Liancour.html, accessed 25 August 2020.

M. J. de St. Martin, M.J. *L'Art de faire des armes reduit a ses vrais principes*, 1804 (Vienne, AT: Janne Schrämble, Google Books).

——, *The Art of Fencing reduced to True Principles*, 1804, trans. P.T. Crawley (Lulu Press, 2014).

——. *New Method of Fencing*, 1708, *Highland Swordsmanship: Techniques of the Scottish Swordmasters*, ed. Mark Rector (Union City, CA: Chivalry Bookshelf, 2001), 89-189.

John McArthur, *The Army and Navy Gentleman's Companion*, 1780, ed. Philip T. Crawley. "Study," The Smallsword Project, https://smallswordproject.com/historic-texts/, 2 September 2020.

Francis Nivelon, *The Rudiments of Genteel Behavior*, 1737 (London, Archive.org.)

J. Olivier, *Fencing Familiarized: or, A New Treatise of the Art of Sword Play*, 1771 (London, UK: John Bell, Google Books)

Le Sieur Rameau, *Le Maître a Danser*, 1755 (Paris, FR: Chez Jean Villette, Google Books).

Kellom Tomlinson, *The Art of Dancing Explained by Reading and Figures*, 1735 London: Published by the Author, and Printed at the Red and Gold Flower Pot, Goolge Books)

Philibert, Sieur de la Touche, *Les Vrays principes de l'espée suele dédiés*, 1670 (Paris, FR, Bibliothèque nationale de France Gallica).

——, *The True Principles of the Single Sword*, 1670, trans. by Rainier van Noort and Antoine Coudre (Glasgow, UK: Fallen Rock Publishing, 2015).

More Recent Works

Chan, Carl W., MD, and Andrew Rudins, 'Foot Biomechanics During Walking and Running,' *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* 69 (1994): 448-461.
Greenhalg, Andrew, et al., 'Influence of Surface on Impact Shock Experienced During a Fencing Lunge,' *Journal of Applied Biomechanics* 29: 4 (2013), 463-467

Hageli, Mme. Ursula, 'Ballet Evolved—At the Court of Louis XIV,' *Royal Opera House*, Youtube.com, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LDtpDlCf94g, accessed 25 August 2020.

"The Lunge," http://mac9.ucc.nau.edu/manuscripts/pcapo/lunge.html, accessed 6 September 2020.

Malcolm-Davies, Jane, "And at the Plastron Push': The Historical Development of Fencing Kit,' *Costume* 36.1 (2002), 100-111.
Pugliese, Patri J., 'Dancing and Fencing from the Renaissance,' *On Common Ground 4: Reconstruction and Re-creation in Dance before 1850: Proceedings of the Fourth DHDS Conference*, ed. David Parsons (London, UK: Dolmetsch Historical Dance Society Conference, 2003) 5-28.

——, 'Parallels between Fencing and Dancing in Late Sixteenth Century Treatises,' in *The Massachusetts Center for Renaissance Studies Newsletter* (Autumn 2005), 1-9.

Schmeltzpfenning, T., and T. Brauner, 'Foot Biomechanics and Gait,' *Handbook of Footwear Design and Manufacture, Woodhead Publishing Series in Textiles* (Amsterdam, NL: Elsevier 2013) 27-48.

Wilson, William, *The Arte of Defense* (California: Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013).