

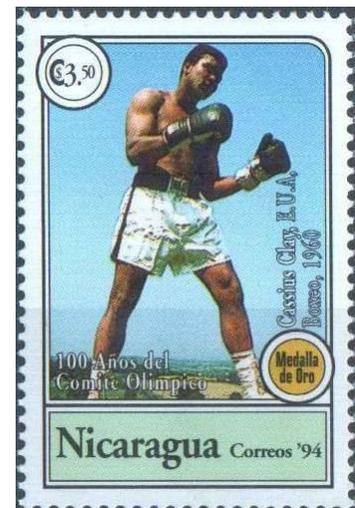
HEMA FOOTWORK

This document reflects my thoughts in some points on footwork inside HEMA, such the way we should move and what kind of shoes. I provide my best explanations for it, surely someone can have discrepancies, in that case just take what you like from here.

When I first started Historical Fencing, my master Alex Basullas used to tell me that I walked like a duck. It took me long time to get comfortable transporting my body from one point to another while moving the sword accordingly. After 12 years in HEMA I specialized myself in Verdadera and Vulgar Destreza Rapier, also I have some proud usage of smallsword and Spear. All along I reached few considerations related to feet movement that I want to share with you. In my arrival to Canada someone mentioned I move as if I was transported by a cloud. I don't totally get it, but I like to think it was a compliment.

Keep moving

Whatever sword you have in your hands keep yourself moving. Circle the opponent, move in and out of range but mostly: play around her. Back in the days, the boxer Muhammad Ali surprised the world with his *dancing* moves around the ring, the most astonished were his opponents, who couldn't have clear hits against him, I encourage you to see his fight against Cleveland Williams, the poor fellow couldn't find Ali during the whole fight. Do the same, keep moving. Do not stop. Stopping is conceding. You do not want to give your opponent an easy target. As well, when you move your feet, make the rest of your body follow the same rhythm, which relates us to the next point.



Follow the melody

The arms, body and feet would need to move accordingly, it should be like different instruments playing together for creating a good symphony. Nice words, but what do I mean? For example, a big lunge can expose your leg and body bend down behind your sword and be protected (check Capoferro lunge). Every time we move, we create openings, we should have the body ready to react and stop any offense from our opponent.

The same way must use the arms while moving in any direction in order to keep a stable balance, specially when we do very strong and rapid movements with our feet. Also, it is important to keep yourself profiled (depending on the weapon you are using) but at least have any time a correct stance that can allow you to change towards offense or defense (duh!). That is the reason why you see many fancy fencers with an arm extended behind the body, as if they were waiters. It is not just for being elegant, but also for keeping the balance and hiding the part of the body that are not actively using.

My front foot, where should it to?

People get troubled when I tell them to point at their enemy with the front foot. This principle is MOSTLY OBLIGED for the way I teach Verdadera Destreza, with rapier and smallsword. We move in and out the threatened zone with short and rapid steps and our ultimate objective is our enemy, where our most powerful and rapid step will go towards. Pointing at our enemy with our foot will make all your body well profiled towards her, having a good stance in defense and ready to offense by sometimes just flexing the knee and closing the distance we need for the thrust.

However, in long and powerful steps, we carry not only our whole weight behind but the kinetic energy we also created. In this occasion it is STRONGLY suggested, (I would say obliged) to point the foot directed to the direction you are moving (at least in the same line, since you can go backwards). I believe it is norm to ALWAYS do so in any martial art system or sport. Many authors, even related to Destreza commented about it. In the case we do a powerful step and our foot is NOT pointing at the direction we are going, we can create a blockage in our knee and have serious injures such joint break, dislocation or tear. It would be something that can have consequences for the rest of your life. That being said, even if you are sparring gently with your partner but you decide to do a very long and powerful side step, do it with your foot pointing at the direction you are moving at. Once you reach point B, you can pivot and turn your body back towards your opponent.

If you use your hip to execute a powerful hit make sure to rotate the feet, as if you were a golfer making a swing. This, it would not only help you profile behind your sword but give as well the speed and power your sword needs to take off. Of course, we always control our hits and we stop accelerating them before reaching the objective, always and anytime.

Control the Ground

Every person with culture knows the famous sentence "I have the high ground Anakin". The character in that moment would not refer just to the height, but also the stability he has at the moment. When stepping, we must always be in contact with the floor as much as we can. That means: no Jumping! Good rulesets tournaments such the one of Montréal Sword Meisters do warnings for jumping. Lacking contact with the floor is losing the control you can exert with your body. In the air the fencer cannot change speed or direction and of course, cannot stop. Also, her landing can be dangerous depending on the actions with the opponent.

Moreover, you should avoid sliding yourself by gliding over your feet, even when you do a lunge. Exactly for the same reason we do not move through the air: lack of control. I used to slide-lunge in my first years of fencing. In my defense I would say we were training in an inside place that was full of sand and dust, having solid movements wasn't much of an option. But again, sliding is a loose of control of your body, you do not know when it will stop and how much you would glide. So, avoid doing so.

Another thing I generally point is: avoid moving with the tip of your feet or not having the whole flat of your feet when walking or executing any action with the sword. In some specific occasions is good to flex the back foot, for example when doing a *transversal* step towards inside with the front foot, the back foot can be flexed in order to allow more balance (see Destreza Glossary file also published). Generally speaking: hold yourself to the ground!

Type of Shoes

I remember my very first day of class, when I ended up sparring wearing mountain boots: that was an incredibly bad idea. It wasn't my fault! I didn't know I would fight. I just went to the club to *see* what the heck was historical fencing. During these many years I used many different shoes and all of them had pros and cons.

GYMNASTICS SHOES - Resembling the shoes used also for Kung-fu. I actually was using them for that as well. They make you feel fast and agile like Bruce Lee. Problem? Once the sole becomes a bit dirty, they are slippery and it will give you the issue of sliding that I mentioned before. As well they do not protect your feet if any hit is given. For the same reason we should not go bare feet.

BASKETBALL SHOES - Excellent for protecting your ankle, not only against hits but also for wrong movements, that is the purpose of the design of those shoes. The problem again is that the sole is very flat and once gets dirty it becomes slippery. You can clean it often to avoid that. Once, before the final of a tournament I cleaned the sole with cola. It worked better than holy water, but don't do it, is disgusting. Do not do what I do but what I say.

RURAL RACE SHOES - Or **RURAL RUNNING** shoes. I frankly believe they are the best I got until now. You do not need to put a lot of money, but check that the rubber of the sole is made of really good quality. It has to feel a bit sticky to the touch and tender as well. Those of bad quality have a very dry type of material, pass your hand over it and you would know what I am talking about. Another good thing about the rural running shoes are the studs they have; they are the right side and they give you the grip you need to avoid sliding. As well, remember to buy them with white sole, in order to not leave marks in your gym or the place you train. You don't want to piss of anyone.

