

Deciphering the footwork in
Additional Manuscript 39564.

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This essay is an examination of the footwork in the British Library's Additional Manuscript 39564, also known as The Ledall Manuscript. It looks at the way the terms are used, along side contemporary English writings, to define the various methods of footwork that are used within the system.

The Ledall text used in this essay is my personal translation into modern English and can be found on the Wiktenauer site.¹ It is based on the transcription by Steve Hick, which can be found on various websites. In addition to the transcription provided by Steve Hick, there are also three plays that were unreadable until Terry Brown was able to study the manuscript under UV lighting conditions. All those who study the English sources owe Mr Brown a debt not only for his work in transcribing them, but also for making them available for others to study.

¹ [http://wiktenauer.com/wiki/Ledall_Roll_\(Additional_MS_39564\)](http://wiktenauer.com/wiki/Ledall_Roll_(Additional_MS_39564))

The core of any martial art is its footwork and, as with training, it is the most obvious place to start when discussing the system of combat depicted within Ledall's manuscript.

One of the major issues surrounding the interpretation of footwork within the Ledall manuscript is that footwork is not always specified, or even mentioned. On some occasions, as with the "proffer, rake with a quarter", this is due to the correct movements being described in the first instance of the technique, and from then onward the author uses a form of truncation, probably to prevent the written plays becoming overly long or verbose. In other situations, it may be due to the author expecting the reader to be aware of the mechanics of a given movement, and does not feel the need to specify; unless he is using footwork that is not traditional for the technique or concept he is describing. A further issue is that the work is not standardised; the terms he uses are often generic, and many simply refer to abstract concepts where the application is dependant on the context of the specific play. To this end, this investigation looks at what general concepts of footwork can be derived, rather than when and how the footwork is applied within Ledall's system. The investigation will also exclude the first two flourishes, as they do not necessarily represent the author's combat system, a point that will be discussed at a later date.

Examination of the document reveals four main terms referencing the leg, foot, or feet: “set”, “void”, “followed” and “spring”. There are also some minor references to other words or phrases that may suggest additional footwork, as well as providing insight into possible body posture. This latter concept will be discussed at the end of the document.

Forward and Backward.

The most basic concepts of movement one might expect to see within a manuscript of this type would be the movements forwards or backwards. While these descriptors can indeed be found within the manuscript, it is proposed here that they are not generally in reference to footwork. There is in fact only one direct reference to moving a foot “forward”, in the Sixth Chase, and there are no references to moving a foot “backward”. As there are 18 references that specifically mention a forward movement (“set in”) of a foot, or leg, we can consider that the reference in the Sixth Chase is an abnormality.

Perhaps the most compelling example that “backward” does not relate to footwork can be found in the Third Chase:

“The Third Chase

A double-round forward, a double-round backward. A down-right stroke voiding back the left leg, a back-thrust voiding back the right leg, following in with the left leg smite a quarter backward. (If it is played twice it will bring you to your ground.)”

The final action of this play is *“following in with the left leg smite a quarter backward.”* Here the reader is instructed to “follow in” with the left foot while smiting a “quarter backward”. To “follow in” is a subset of the “set in” and is discussed later, but suffice to say it involves moving “in” towards the opponent, so the “quarter backwards” is highly unlikely to be made moving the feet “backward”. The idea of the “quarter backwards” as a motion separate from the movement of the feet is further supported by the quarters that are made while “voiding”.

References to these voiding quarters can be found throughout the document. They are on occasions described in full, such as *“voiding back the same foot with another quarter”* (the First Chase), but are also often truncated to “another void” (Second Counter) or “a void” (Sixth Counter). These examples give clear indication that a “quarter” can be made when moving “in” toward the opponent or when “voiding” away from the opponent, and they suggest strongly that the “quarter backward” is a separate technique that the Third Chase indicates can be made while moving forward. The other references to “forward” or “backward” are all made in correlation with “double rounds” which appear to be a specific technique or action of the blade.

Without going into a complete interpretation of the technique itself, we can see from a brief look at the plays including the technique that there is only one sequence where any form of footwork is mentioned: the Sixth Chase. In this play we are advised to perform the technique “all upon the left foot lithely delivered”. It is proposed that this quote means that all of the strikes are made with the left foot forward, starting from a left-leg lead, as there is no other mention of the common terms such as “set” or “void”.

A further example that “back” or “backward” does not always refer to the movement of the body or legs is the “Fourth Chase”:

“The Fourth Chase Called the Bow-Thrust

A double-round forward, a double-round backward. A down-right stroke voiding back the left leg, a back-thrust with a bow-thrust voiding back the right leg, lithely a quarter.”

Taking this play from the point where we know that the left leg is “voided” due to the down-right stroke. We are advised to make three different actions of the blade, but only one reference is made to footwork. The previous play describes a “*back-foyne voiding back the right leg*” so it is possible that this sequence is intended to be executed in the same manner; however, we must consider that it is also made in conjunction with a “bow-thrust”. Upon examination of this section of the text there is a certain ambiguity as to which instructions refer to what actions: should the “*voiding back with the right leg*” be the accompanying footwork for the preceding “bow-foyne” or for the following “quarter”?

There is only one other example in the manuscript where the author uses the term “voiding back with” in specific reference to footwork:

“The 12th Called iii Points Same

A down-right stroke voiding back the left leg, lithely play a rake followed with the right leg. Then void back the same leg and suddenly play a quarter.”

In this play it is much easier to assess what footwork relates to which action, as the three distinct actions each have their own accompanying footwork description. So, we can see here that the “voiding back with the left leg” relates specifically to the action before it: the downright stroke.

Returning to the Fourth Chase, “*A back-foyne with a bow-foyne voiding back with the right leg lithely smite a quarter*”, we can therefore assume confidently that the voiding of the right leg is in conjunction with the “bow-foyne”. We can also assume that the “back foyne” was made standing still, as the previous action ended with the left foot behind. This would suggest that the “back” of the “back foyne” is not related to footwork but to a different aspect of the action or technique.

In addition to the terms “forward” and “backward” in association with specific techniques, we also have the terms “fore” and “back”. These terms are used as qualifiers fore-foynes (thrusts) so that we have a “fore-foyne” or a “back-foyne”, though the term “back” is also found in conjunction with a “void” when referencing a movement of the feet.

It is notable that we are only advised in one instance in the whole manuscript to “bring back” a given foot. This is in the Sixth Chase where we are advised to “bring back the same foot with a back thrust”, and it is interesting that the author felt it necessary to specify that the foot needed to be brought back when executing a “back-thrust”. It is also not surprising that the author often uses the term “back” alongside “void”, as “voids” can be made “standing still”, as well as “above his head”, so in the instances where the “void” is not used as part of a truncation it would be appropriate for some form of additional qualifier.

Investigation of the “fore-foyne” does not reveal any direction in footwork. However, the Eight Chase does give us some indication:

“The Eighth Chase Called the Spring

*A full stroke, a fore-thrust, setting forth the left foot with the left hand smite a spring,
voiding back the same foot with a full stroke....”*

As is discussed below, the descriptor “full” implies a powerful strike made from the right side while setting forward the right foot. So, we can assume that the full stroke finishes with the right foot forward. The fore-thrust has no indicator, while the action after advised to set forth the left foot, thus revealing that the fore-thrust is made standing still. In many of the other instances of the fore-thrust there is ambiguity as to the precise footwork. However, the Seventh Counter does advise to make it “standing still”:

“The Seventh Point Called the Down-Right Stroke

*A proffer, a rake with a quarter, another, a void. A down-right stroke followed with
the right leg, then standing still lithely play a fore-thrust with a quarter and another
void be at your stop.”*

In the Eighth Counter it is also possible to discern that the “fore-foyne” is made while standing still:

“The 8th Called the Rabbit With a Down-Right Stroke

A proffer, a rake with a quarter, a void. A downright stroke followed with the right leg, with a fore-thrust. Setting in the left leg lithely play....”

Indeed, anywhere in the manuscript where techniques before and after advise footwork, we can see that the “fore-foyne” should be made while standing still. Yet, there are thrusts that are made “setting in” that are not describe as “fore-foynes”.

“The Dragon's Tail With a Pendant

A proffer with a rake standing still, with your right hand play an empty quarter above his head and as the sword waves about your head set in your left foot, then lithely with the right hand and foot thrust forth a thrust at his face.....”

The “fore-foyne” seems to be made exclusively while standing still, and there are clear examples of the “back-foyne” being made standing still. Other “thrusts” are made “setting in”, so the only conclusion that can be drawn is that the prefixes “fore” and “back” do not relate to the direction of the body or feet, but somehow define the action of the blade.

When we consider this, along with the “double rounds” being made forward or backward “upon the left foot”, it seems highly probably that the “double round forward” or “backward” does not refer to the movement of the feet, but more likely a

concept in reference to the action of the blade. Having separated “forward” and “backward” from the footwork it is possible to see that the main terms used are to “set” or to “void”.

“Sets” and “Following in”.

The term “set” is used in reference to the right foot a total of thirteen times in twelve different plays, while there are seven “set” references to the left foot in seven different plays. Of the thirteen right foot “sets”, all but one are used in conjunction with the word “in”, so the indication of footwork can be better termed “set in”. The word “set” itself is found in many medieval sources in the context of “putting in place”.² There are many ways by which the word “in” could be used in medieval English; for example, in-ward, inside, etc. This investigation would suggest that it is used simply with the context of the engagement between the two combatants as described in the plays; that is to say “in towards the opponent”. It is not possible to define the exact movement, as the author (as mentioned previously) gives no definitions or gloss of the term. It may be a simple passing step along the centre line of attack, or alternatively it may be that the author intended that the combatant should pass with a sloping step, going slightly off the centre line. However, further qualifiers, such as “lithely” or “softly”, can accompany these “sets”, and later discussion will examine the effects that these may have on the associated footwork or action.

² [a1450-1509 Rich.\(Brunner\)](#) 102: Pey sette tresteles, and layde a bord; Cloþ off sylk þeron was sprad.

Unfortunately the author did not use this term consistently to define stepping in towards the opponent. It is also possible to find the terms “following” or “followed” associated with footwork. There are a total of ten occurrences in ten plays, eight of these being in direct reference to the movement of the right foot, one to the left foot, and the other an indicator of techniques that “follow” a specific action. The term is often used in conjunction with a reference to an action of the blade, and while the blade may be moving either forward or backwards, it appears that the term refers to setting forward one foot or another.

The most apparent example of this can be seen in the named play “The Laying Down of Your Sword”. This play starts with a proffer, a rake and then a quarter, a combination of techniques that start the majority of the manuscript’s counters. In the First Counter we are given a full description of the combination:

“A proffer at his face standing still. Then set in the right foot with a rake and a quarter, ...”

Moving on to look at “The Laying Down of Your Sword”, we can see that the same combination of techniques is used. However, “set in” is replaced by “following”:

*“A proffer to his face, following in with the right leg with a rake. Standing still smite
a quarter fare before you...”*

Further examples of the term “following” replacing “set” can be found in the Third Chase where the practitioner is advised to “follow in with the right foot” after being advised to execute the previous technique “voiding back the right leg”. In the Ninth, Tenth and Twelfth Chases, we also see a “rake followed with the right leg”. A “downright stroke followed with the right leg” can also be found in the Seventh and Eighth Counters. It therefore seems appropriate to assume that “followed” or “following” is simply an alternative to “set”.

The inclusion of this term to indicate a forward movement of the foot also reveals an additional type of movement. Considering the Sixth Chase:

*“with a down-right stroke set forward the right foot, bringing the sword above your
head void back the left foot, with an other down-right stroke followed with the right
foot”*

We can see that the reader is instructed to “set forward” the right foot, “void” the left, and then “follow” with the right foot. Consequently this gives a full pass in toward the opponent, finishing with the right leg leading. The instruction is then to move backwards, “void” (as discussed later) the rear leg, before then moving the front leg forwards again. It is entirely possible that the reader is intended to only move the

indicated foot by simply extending the leg in the given direct. In this specific case that would mean standing right foot forward, extending the left further backward and then the right further forward creating an extremely wide stance that is likely to be extremely unbalanced. Given that balance is the foundation of any martial art, it is highly unlikely that the author wished the practitioner to be in such an unbalanced position, so it is necessary to look to other possibilities for this type of footwork.

To prevent this over-extension, the most obvious action would be to have the opposite foot immediately follow that of the initiating foot. That is to say, as the left (rear) leg voids, the right (lead) foot gathers up in the same direction to maintain the distance between the feet, the depth of the stance, and the balance of the practitioner. The reverse applies when “setting in” the right foot, where it would then be the left foot that gathers up toward the leading right foot. This “gathering” step seems the simplest and most logical possibility, and also forms part of the basic footwork of other systems of European longsword play, of masters such as and Ringeck, of the Liechtenauer.³

It is worth noting that in the Harleian manuscript there is mention of a “Koc step” which may be comparable. Again, the author of the Harleian manuscript gives no form of gloss or discussion of techniques, actions or footwork, so one must look to a more generic usage of the work. “Koc” is likely to be author’s spelling of “cock”, as in “cockerel”. He would have undoubtedly been familiar with cock fighting, either as a sport or from observing confrontation between the animals from his day-to-day

³ Tobler, C. *Secrets of German Medieval Swordsmanship: Sigmund Ringeck's Commentaries on Liechtenauer*. Chivalry Bookshelf, 2002. need to expand this reference

environment. In these conflicts, cockerels lift the front leg to scratch at their opponent, while driving forwards – a motion which is powered by the rear leg. It is possible that this may refer to some form of kick, as depicted in Talhoffer⁴ or Fiore,⁵ although in Harley they are accompanied by actions of the blade and on some occasions are executed as repetitive actions.. It is suggested here that they more closely resemble the previously mentioned “setting” steps of the lead leg from the Ledall manuscript.

Void and Voiding.

Having established that “set in” moves one in toward the opponent, it is now necessary to look at another common term: “void”. The “void” is used in conjunction with the feet or with direct reference to an action. With instruction referring to the feet, the precise term used is “voiding”. The term itself is quite common in medieval English and means “space” or “to empty”⁶ and within the manuscript it is often accompanied by “back”.

⁴ Rector, M. Medieval Combat: A Fifteenth-century illustrated Manual of Swordfighting and Close-Quarter Combat. Greenhill books. 2000.

⁵ [http://www.the-exiles.org.uk/fioreproject/Fiore%20Getty%20MS%20Representation%20\(Combined\).pdf](http://www.the-exiles.org.uk/fioreproject/Fiore%20Getty%20MS%20Representation%20(Combined).pdf) . p97

⁶ ([a1500\(c1410\) Dives & P.\(Htrn 270\)](#) 1.319: Onon a tonne þat lay þer ... voyde, sodeynly was ... ful of olee., [a1500 Rule Serve Ld.\(Add 37969\)](#) 12/28: Send þe voyde dysshes to þe kechyn)

“The First Point of the Counter

A proffer at his face standing still. Then set in the right foot with a rake and a quarter, voiding back the same foot with another quarter, then void back your left leg and stand at your stop.”

In the above Chase, the reader is advised to set in the right foot with the “*rake and a quarter*”, then to void back the same foot before “voiding back” the other leg. While it may be possible that the first “void” is made as a gathering step so that the second quarter is struck to the same side, the final void is made without any accompanying action of the blade. As this second void is intended to bring the engagement to a point at which a combatant may “stop” fighting, it seems appropriate to surmise that it is intended to bring the fighter out of distance, and is therefore likely to be a full passing step. The following Counters also follow this pattern, which would support the theory that “voiding” is primarily an indication of passing backwards.

The author of the manuscript also uses the term “a void” on many occasions, in a way that implies a stand-alone technique. It appears each time as part of a set combination of moves. So, in the first counter:

“The First Point of the Counter

A proffer at his face standing still. Then set in the right foot with a rake and a quarter, voiding back the same foot with another quarter, then void back your left leg and stand at your stop.”

this technique becomes:

“The Second Counter Called the Full Spring

A proffer, a rake with a quarter, another void.....”

The truncation can be found again in the Eighth and Eleventh Counters. In essence, it is not so much a technique, but a truncation of a technique accompanied by a specific foot work, continuing the pattern of usage that would support the hypothesis that the “void” is a full pass backwards.

These “sets”, “voids” and “followings” give us the basic footwork that one would need to engage in combat with the longsword. They allow us to move into striking range, manage that range, and also allow us to move out of striking range. However, the author also gives additional footwork that allows us to manage and manipulate distance in more complex ways.

Springs.

The most notable of these is the “spring” which has four different forms” the “short spring”, “spring”, “full spring” and a “full, short spring”. It appears that the “spring” is an actual technique made with the sword, which can vary in each application, but also includes a set form of footwork that is used to change the line of attack and create variation within the fighting distance.

This article will not deal with the individual actions of the sword that make up the complete techniques; it will simply try to reconstruct the movement of the feet. The reasoning behind this is that the “spring” can incorporate a strike to the head, the leg, or knee, or alternatively can be made with a thrust. The “spring” therefore demonstrates that the manual does not deal with specific techniques, but rather it is an expression of concepts and principles – the boundaries of which blur with the physical technique.

The author provides no definition or description of the “spring”, so once again any attempt to reconstruct the footwork must examine how the word is used, and look to the wider context of the surrounding movements within the play. Historically the word “spring” can mean the source of a stream where the water “bubbles” from the ground, to “come up” or “grow” as in the way that plants may “spring forth”.⁷

⁷ ([?c1425\(c1380\) Chaucer Form.A.\(Benson-Robinson\)](#) 10: Corn up-sprong [vr. up sprange], unsowe of mannes hond) or to “burst open” or fly apart ([c1600\(c1350\) Alex.Maced.\(Grv 60\)](#) 296:Pei craked þe cournales..Pat spedly tosprong and spradde beside.)

The word can also be used to mean “to leap”, as one might leap into battle, or into the saddle of a horse.⁸

The first play in which the spring occurs is the Eighth Chase, aptly named the “the Spring”, and it is here that we get further indicators of how the movement may be executed:

“The Eighth Chase Called the Spring

A full stroke, a fore-thrust, setting forth the left foot with the left hand smite a spring, voiding back the same foot with a full stroke. Then play a back-thrust with another spring, voiding back the left leg with a full stroke, then void back the right foot and play a double-thrust with a spring. Voiding back the left foot with a full-stroke playing another double-thrust with a spring, voiding back the left foot with full-stroke and a back-thrust.”

In this play the reader is first advised to make the “spring” by moving the left foot and to strike with the left hand. As has been mentioned previously, “sets” are indicative of full passing steps. However, while they are normally “set in”, here the foot is set “forth”, suggesting that it may not be expected to land before the spring is made. If we accept that the previous movements of the play will have brought us into a distance where we can strike the opponent, then it seems unlikely that (even if the opponent

⁸ ([a1500\(?a1325\) Otuel & R \(Fil\)](#)384: The sarisin spreng in-to the sadyl anone. [a1500\(?a1325\) Otuel & R \(Fil\)](#)434: A-none a-3eyn to hors they sprong. [a1500\(a1400\) Libeaus \(Clg A.2\)](#) 337: To-gedere þey gonne spryng; Fauchouns hy gonn outflyng And fo3te fell and faste. [a1500 Octav.\(1\) \(Cmb Ff.2.38\)](#) 160/1385: When Florent sawe þat swete wyght, He sprange [Thrn: spreng] as fowle dothe yn flyght.)

has voided) the morphing of this left pass into a “spring” or “leap” is to be done along the centre line, as a simple “set left” should theoretically be enough to pursue the opponent.

At this point the reader is also advised to strike with the “left hand” and it seems reasonable to assume that this means that one should release the right hand in order to complete the action. The benefit of releasing the right hand from the sword, while the left foot is leading, is that it increases the range of the strike that one is attempting to make.⁹ As has already been mentioned, the practitioner, at this point, is already within range of striking the opponent with a simple “set”.

So, why would one need to increase range by leaping, and at the same time releasing the right hand from the blade? It is proposed here that it is because the “spring” takes one far from the centre line and changes the line of attack, and due to this the technique requires an increase in reach in order to strike the opponent.

Having established that the “spring” is potentially a movement that incorporates a large, or leaping, step off the centre line, it is possible to look to the variants of the action to define the ways in which they can be executed.

There are a total of fourteen “springs” appearing in twelve different plays: seven “full springs”, four “springs”, two “short springs”, and one “full short spring”. Taking the “full spring”, we can see that it appears in only in the “counters”, in plays 2, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21 and 23.

⁹ With the left foot leading, the right arm must cross the body as well as pass the left hand in order to maintain its position on the hilt, which limits the range of the strike.

Plays 2, 15 (though the spring is not completed), and 16 all start following on from “a proffer, a rake, a quarter...a void” and thus all start with a left leg lead. The “full spring” of the 23rd Counter is made after “set in your left leg across before your right leg” and therefore starts with the left leg leading. The 18th, 19th and 21st Counters all follow a “rabet” where we have been advised to “set in” the left leg, which again demonstrates that the “full spring” starts with the left foot forward.

Determining which leg is to be the lead leg after the “full spring” is a more complicated process. The 15th Counter can be excluded, as the “full spring” should not be made, and appears to be used as a feint. Looking at the other plays, it is difficult to acknowledge any kind of pattern that might indicate the stance of the completed “full spring”.

Both the 2nd and 19th Counters follow the “full spring” with a “quarter void”. The 16th and 21st Counters involve “another quarter, a [quarter] void”. The 18th involves “a full quarter, another, a void and be at your stop”, while the 23rd simply advises to void back the left foot.

As the “full spring” starts with the left leg leading and sets forward the right leg, in much the same way as the “rake, quarter”, we can assume that the same abbreviation between the 1st Counter’s “voiding back the same foot with another” and the 2nd Counter’s “another void” associated with the “proffer, rake, quarter” can be applied to the occurrence “another void” in association with the “full spring” in the same play. The truncation of the various “proffer, rake, quarter” can also be used to support that the “full springs” of the 16th and 21st Counters are also intended to be completed with the right leg forwards.

In these two counters (the 16th and 21st), the reader is instructed to do “another quarter, a void” immediately after the “full spring”. In the progression of the “proffer, rake, quarter” calligraphic development, the author moves from the full description in the first counter to a truncated version in the counters immediately following, until the 7th Counter where we see “A proffer, a rake with a quarter, another, a void”. At first glance the reader may believe that the author may have intended that the “rake, quarter” should then be followed by a quarter to the other side. However, if we look to the 14th Counter, we can see that the next indicated footwork is to stand still, and then to set in the right leg:

“The 14th Point Called the Turning Quarter

A proffer, a rake with a full quarter, another, a void. Then softly set in your right leg, be at your stop. That done, set in your left leg with a rabett fare above his head. Lithely set in your right leg with a down-right stroke at his head, with a thrust and a full quarter with another, a void, be at your stop.”

If the author had intended that the “another” quarter should be made while setting in the left leg, then the void would result in a right leg lead. As we are then advised to “softly set in your right leg”, we can assume that we are to step in, particularly since we are then told to set in the left foot with rabett, a technique that is made (in every other instance) either setting in with the left leg or standing still.

Having established that these two plays involve a “quarter” followed by a “quarter” on the same side, we can then look at the 18th Counter:

“The 18th Called the Double Rabett

A proffer, a rake with a full quarter. Lithely set in the left leg with a rabett, standing still lithely play another rabett, with a full spring at his leg, (otherwise set in your right leg with a down-right stroke at his head) and a full quarter, another, a void and be at your stop.”

He we are advised to make the full spring, incorporating a strike to the leg, that is then followed by a full quarter, another quarter and then a void. Again there is little instruction as to whether these are made while passing, gathering or standing still. Due to the similarity of the use of short hand that has been discussed previously, it is proposed here that the repeated quarters are made with the right foot forward, the quarter void ending left foot forward as with every other quarter void in the manuscript.

This means that so far six of the seven “full springs” are started left foot forward and finish right foot forward. The remaining play is the 23rd counter where we are advised to “void back the left foot and be at your stop”. Unlike the previous voids, this is unaccompanied by any strike, and would therefore seem that its sole purpose is to bring the combatant out of distance. This means that it is particularly difficult to assess whether it is made from a starting position with the left foot forwards or at the rear.

However, looking to the fact that all previous “full springs” are completed with a right leg lead, then it seems highly probable that this specific “full spring” is also intended to finish in a similar manner. Having established that the “full spring” starts with a left leg lead and finishes with the right leg leading, it is then necessary to consider on how the practitioner is expected to move in order to get to this position.

As has been mentioned previously, the first reference to the “spring” advises to “set forth the left foot”. This phrasing lacks the permanence or stability of “set in”, and here it is suggested that this is a main indicator as to how the various forms of “spring” are executed in reality. In these “springs”, the author is instructing the practitioner to “set” one leg forward, as one might make the standard pass mentioned earlier, but this is then converted into a “spring” before the pass is completed and the foot hits the ground. If the spring starts as a standard “set”, then there comes a point in time at which the action must be modified to facilitate the leap out to one’s side. As the power to facilitate the spring must be drawn from the stationary leg, the conversion must take place at a point at which the full body is in balance; too early and the weight of the body is behind the static leg, too late and the weight will be too far forward. The optimal point is when the passing leg is alongside the static leg, as the momentum can carry the body forward while the static leg drives the lateral movement to bring the body off line.

While this footwork brings the practitioner off line, alone it will leave him at a point where he is still facing forward while the opponent is stood to one side. This means that the practitioner must also turn his body in order to face his opponent. As there are a wide variety of actions that are made with the blade while performing the “spring”, it seems reasonable to assume that one is supposed to remain facing the opponent.

Two sequences support this notion further: The 13th Counter (where the author instructs the reader to “smite a spring turning with a full stroke”) and the 15th Chase (where we are advised to “*bend your body as if you would smite a full spring...*”).

Now, knowing that the practitioner must turn his body to remain square with his opponent, we are left with a different issue.

This issue is highlighted if we attempt to reconstruct a “full spring” as depicted in any of the plays. Starting with the left foot forward, one brings the right level as if to make the standard pass, then drives off from the left foot, leaping forwards and out to the right, turning the body to remain oriented on the opponent. With no other instruction, we must assume for the time being that the left leg is simply meant to stay in approximately the same position, perhaps being “dragged” to facilitate the “spring”.

This leaves the practitioner in a position where the left leg is still the lead leg, but as mentioned previously the “full spring” should finish with the right leg leading. It is therefore possible to assume that some form of movement is intended to be incorporated into the “full spring” that will bring the left foot around behind the right.

The simplest answer is to sweep the left foot in an arc, an action that also counter balances the body movement, as well as providing the proper body mechanics for a strike made from the right side.

Of the four “springs” it is possible to discern that the three from the Eighth Chase all start with a right leg lead and are followed by a left leg void, while the final spring from the Thirteenth Chase is so vague as to make interpretation of the footwork pointless. Taking those of the Eighth Chase, it is possible to deduce from the following left void means that the “spring” starts left leg leading and ends left leg leading.

“The Eighth Chase Called the Spring

A full stroke, a fore-thrust, setting forth the left foot with the left hand smite a spring, voiding back the same foot with a full stroke. Then play a back-thrust with another spring, voiding back the left leg with a full stroke, then void back the right foot and play a double-thrust with a spring. Voiding back the left foot with a full-stroke playing another double-thrust with a spring, voiding back the left foot with full-stroke and a back-thrust.”

The first “spring” in this play is relatively easy to interpret, as the reader is advised to “set forth” the left foot while making the “spring”, and then to “void” the same (left) foot with the “full stroke”. Upon examination, we can say for certain that when footwork is mentioned, the “full stroke” is always made in a way that ends with the practitioner having the right leg leading, and the first “spring” of the Eighth Chase would appear follow this pattern. The second of these “springs” is a little more ambiguous as it is preceded by a “back-thrust”. As was mentioned at the start of this article, “back” rarely refers to the movement of the feet, so it is entirely possible that the “back-thrust” is made standing still.

The Third Chase further supports this, where we see the second mention of “back-thrust” within the manuscript:

“The Third Chase

A double-round forward, a double-round backward. A down-right stroke voiding back the left leg, a back-thrust voiding back the right leg.....”

Here the reader is instructed to make the “back-thrust” while voiding back the right leg. However, the previous mention of the “back-thrust” makes no mention of footwork. The Fourth Chase then advises to make the “back-thrust” followed by a “bow-thrust”, and it is the “bow-thrust” that is made upon the voiding action of the right leg:

“The Fourth Chase Called the Bowe-Thrust

A double-round forward, a double-round backward. A down-right stroke voiding back the left leg, a back-thrust with a bow-thrust voiding back the right leg, lithely a quarter.”

As there are confirmed instances of the “back-thrust” performed both with accompanying footwork and made standing still, it seems reasonable to assume that the “back-thrust” of the Eighth Chase is intended to be made standing still, as there is no mention of footwork. This therefore means that the “spring” is made from a position with the right leg leading.

It would appear that the main difference between the “full spring” and “spring” is therefore simply an issue of the leading leg. While this may seem unusual, if we look to the meaning of the word “full”, it can mean “complete” or it can be used as a modifier to indicate “a greater amount of strength”. If we take this latter meaning, then we have the “full spring” as a more powerful strike made from the right, with the less powerful “spring” being made from the left. Considering that 95% of the population are right handed¹⁰, the majority of people will strike with greater power when striking right to left, so this interpretation fits well.

The “short spring” is, however, a different matter, and is somewhat harder to establish in terms of execution due to its limited occurrence. Of the two instances of the “short spring”, one is with a right-leg lead followed by a right set, and the other a left-leg lead followed by a left void. It is interesting to note that while the “full spring” starts with a left-leg lead, and the “spring” a right-leg lead, the pattern regarding the use of the term “full” does not seem to continue with the “short spring” and “full short spring”. In the single occurrence of the “full, short spring” it is started with a left-leg lead and is immediately followed by a “full spring” for which no specific footwork is mentioned. However, the “full spring” follows the pattern of other “full springs”, in that it is followed by a “quarter void”, and it is therefore reasonable to assume that the “full spring” starts with the left leg leading. This would mean that the “full, short spring” would therefore start with a left leg lead and finish with a left leg lead. If we accept this, then it is possible to theorise that the “full short spring” follows the footwork sequences of the second version of the aforementioned “short spring”.

¹⁰ Byers, S. N. 2002. Introduction to Forensic Anthropology, Allyn & Bacon. Boston. Boston USA p383

If it is the case that these both represent the same technique, then we can perhaps view them as both being “full short springs”, and look to view them in relation to the “full spring” which also starts left foot forward. So, both techniques start with the left foot forward; the “full spring” then finishes with the right foot forward by leaping out to the right and bringing the left foot behind in a sweeping arc. The “full short spring” differs in that it finishes with the left leg remaining the lead leg.

As the defining aspect of the “spring” is the changing of the line of attack, we can presume that the “full short spring” continues this concept. It is proposed here that it brings the practitioner to the same line; however, instead of sweeping the left leg behind the body as the “full spring” does, that the leg is allowed to trail and thus results in it being forward of the body. This means that the body is closer to the opponent than with the “full spring” making it “shorter”, and again creating a variable of distance that appears to be indicative of the system depicted in the manuscript. The possibilities from here are then either to set in the right leg with a “full spring” or to void the left leg to fly out of distance.

If it is accepted that the “full short spring” follows the pattern of the “full spring”, in so far as it is made from a position which leads with the left leg, then we may also presume that the “short spring” follows the same pattern of the “spring”. This is corroborated by the only occurrence in the text starting with a right-leg lead, as seen in the many instances of the “spring”. This “short spring”, as with the “full short spring”, ends with the lead leg remaining the same. However, in this play it is then set in again with a strike. This means that the practitioner uses the “short spring” to leap out to the left, striking from the left, and then makes a gathering step to strike from

the right. As a strike on the gathering step is quicker than a strike on a full pass, the practitioner can use this device to alter the tempo of the fight and assist him to maintain the initiative.

Additional Footwork and Movement.

The final movement of the feet described in the manuscript is found in the 23rd Counter, the only play in which the instructions are directly in reference to an opponent:

“The 23rd Called the Facing With the Spring

Also standing at your defence; when your enemy begins to come in with a proffer, look steadfastly in his face and then set in your left leg across before your right leg, lithely smite a full-spring at his leg and then void back your left leg and be at your stop. Other else set in the right foot with a full quarter and another void and be at your stop.”

Here the reader is instructed to “set in your left leg across before your right leg” from the initial starting position. It may be that the author intends the starting position to be with a right leg lead – however, this would mean that one would need to bring the left leg forward of the right, and then cross it over in front of the right. This would be a very difficult action, and time consuming, particularly in response to the opponent initiating an attack. Furthermore, it has been mentioned previously that 95% of the population are right handed and are able to make the most powerful strike from the right side.

It is therefore probable that the author intends for the plays to start from a left leg lead position. This is support by the many Counters that start with “a proffer, a rake”, as we are told in the first counter to make “A proffer at his face standing still then set in your right leg with a rake....”. There are fifteen of the twenty three counters that go on to start with the same set piece, leading to a high probability that the author intended a left leg lead.

Taking this left leg lead, we can go on to investigate the action, and can see that it gives two options once the left leg has been placed across the right. We are advised that we can either make a full spring or set in our right foot. Both options will result in a change of the line of attack, due to the crossing footwork in the initial section of the action. However, this footwork indicates more than the off line movement developed from the various forms of spring, which make no reference to this form of traversing action. That this crossing step is meant to achieve something different from the spring is supported by the accompaniment of either “spring” or “set”, demonstrating that it can move the line of attack to different degrees: to a considerable degree by adding the spring, or to a marginal degree by setting in with the right foot. The purpose of this marginal movement of the body, driven by the left crossing step, can be deduced by this play having the only reference to an opponent.

At the beginning of the play the reader is advised to “look steadfastly at his face” in response to the opponent’s advance. This suggests the maintenance of eye contact with the opponent while stepping. The term “steadfastly” would indeed suggest more than simple eye contact, and one must look to why. If the opponent has moved into

range with his blade extended, dominating the centre line, and the practitioner was to simply set forward his right foot at this point, he would walk onto the tip of extended blade. The same would be true if the practitioner tried a full spring as defined earlier, whereby the right leg is brought alongside the left before leaping out to the right. It is therefore suggested that the admonition to “look him steadfastly in his face” is intended to ensure that the opponent is focused upon the practitioner’s upper body while the first movement of the feet is executed, encouraging the opponent to fully commit into his movement. The cross step means that the upper body remains on the centre until the right foot is brought forward, whereby the body is also moved to the right, removing it from the centre line and the immediate threat from the point of the opponent’s sword. This also gives the practitioner the advantage that his new centre line means he has full extension to strike at the opponent, while the opponent is still orientated on the old centre line and has to reach across his body to be in range of the practitioner. The right set will then bring the practitioner into range to strike at the opponent, while the spring will change the line of attack further, essentially allowing the practitioner to strike the opponent in a way that means that the blade will be approaching from the opponent’s rear.

In addition to the steps of the feet, we are also given additional instructions in regard to different actions. The most notable of these are” “lithely” / “lightly”, “softly”, and (in the case of a void) there is also “standing still”. Looking to the usage of the term lythly (lithely), we find that it used eleven times in nine different plays. The term lyghtly (lightly) appears a total fourteen times in twelve different plays.

Both terms are made in reference to actions the feet or body, or in reference to a specific technique such as a “quarter” or “rabet”, and can be found in Chases and Counters. Historically, the terms can both be used to mean the same i.e. “with agility”¹¹ or “with speed”,¹² and upon investigation of the manuscript it would appear that the author uses the terms inter-changeably. The First Chase mentions a “quarter lithely delivered” and the Second Chase mentions a “quarter lightly delivered”. The same inter-changeability is apparent between the Seventh Chase, where the reader is advised to “standing still lithely play”, and the named play of “The Dragon’s Tayle with a Pendant” where he is advised to “standing still lightly bring back your sword”. Further correlations can be found between the Eighth Counter and the 18th, 22nd and “Stopping Rabbetts”, which are all made in reference to the same type of “rabet”. Due to this inter-changeability, the general meaning of the terms, and the wide variety of applications in which they are used, it is possible to ascertain that they are used in a way that has no great impact upon the actual technique with which they are associated.

The idea that any action would be done with agility is hardly surprising in such a dynamic environment as that of interpersonal conflict. It may be that the terms are simply an affectation of language. Alternatively, their usage may be an indicator that, due to dynamic nature of the fight, one may need to be especially considerate of one’s distance and measure at these specific times.

¹¹ ([a1450\(c1410\) Lovel. Grail \(Corp-C 80\)](#) 14.238: That ded mannes hors he took..lyghtly Into the sadel he gan to gon)

¹² ([52a1500\(?c1400\) Song Roland \(Lnsd 388\)](#) 2: Luk lightly what is best to done)

This latter interpretation would demonstrate that the “sets”, “voids”, “springs” and “followings” defined earlier, need not be confined, precise, definitions of footwork, but that the practitioner must always be fluid in his response to an opponent. This is not exactly surprising from a full and complex martial arts system.

This concludes this interpretation of the author’s instructions on how the feet are moved to enter, maintain and manipulate distance. Yet, he also gives a further clue as to how one should move within a dynamic combat situation: the actions made “standing still”.

There are a total of 15 different plays that mention that a technique or action should be made “standing still”. However, one of these is the First Counter, which advises to make *“A proffer at his face standing still then set in the right leg with a rake and a quarter...”*. As has been mentioned previously, this is then truncated in the following plays where the opening sequence is the same, meaning that the Counters 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18 can also be included in the total figure, giving a complete total of 31 plays.

Not all of these “standings” require true movement of the body, as with the previously mentioned counters, where it is simply the blade that is moved. Indeed, the only plays that make reference to an actual movement of the body made while standing still are the 3rd Counter, 13th Counter, and 15th Counter. The action in the 3rd Counter is a “void standing still”, and appears to be a modification of the starting sequence of the previous two Counters.

In these plays we are advised to make a proffer followed by setting in with rake and a quarter, which is then followed by a quarter on a voiding step. The 3rd Counter follows this starting sequence, but the quarter void is made “standing still”, implying that the movement is made with the body. Assuming that “void” means to “make space”, we can assume that this movement is meant to be significant, for some reason needing to create space between the practitioner and his opponent. While there is no mention as to why we have to void standing, it does lead to another interesting possibility: that of the stance in general.

As has been discussed earlier the term “void” means “to create space”, however, the author expects this to be done without moving the feet suggesting that the movement should be made by the body. If the fighter were to adopt an upright stance, back and legs straight, it would be difficult to create any space with a movement of the body alone. It is therefore suggested here that this movement of the body must be made from a front weighted, wide, low stance with the body leaning forward. This particular stance would allow for a significant movement of the body away from the opponent by pulling the body backward and shifting the weight to the rear leg.

As the “void standing still” is part of a development of the “proffer, a rake and a quarter” sequence that forms the start of many of the Counters, we can surmise that the sequence must naturally create such a stance. It is therefore possible to theorise that the natural stance must be low, with the fighter leaning into his strikes.

In addition to this long stance we can also surmise that there must be width to the stance, due to the author's instruction to "set in your left leg across before your right" in the 23rd Counter. If the reader is advised to move the left leg to a position where it crosses with the right, then it is unlikely to be done from a position where both feet are on the same line, as tactically it would gain the practitioner very little and (as has been mentioned previously) the practitioner should use this to facilitate movement away from the opponent's line of attack.

In conclusion, the author of Additional MS 39564 provides us with a variety of footwork that can move the practitioner in and out of the fight: set/follow and void, which can be made as either full passes or gather steps. In addition, he provides a variety of "springs" and a traverse that can be utilised to change the line of attack, and it is possible to hypothesise that the stance intended is long and wide to facilitate the various actions made "standing still". As with any martial art, the combat between two opponents will be dynamic and fluid, and the manuscript's references to "lightly" and "lithely" demonstrate that the system described is no different.

New English Glossa.

Set – A movement of the feet that takes the fighter toward the opponent. It can be made with a full pass, or a gathering step with the lead leg.

Following – Alternative phrasing of the term “set”.

Void – A movement of the feet used to create space between the fighter and the opponent. It can be either a pass back or a gathering step backwards.

Standing Still – An action made while standing still.

Void Standing Still – A movement of the body that creates space between the fighter and opponent without moving the feet.

Full Spring – A movement that starts with the left foot forward. The right foot is brought along side the left, as if to “set in”, and is then driven off to the right. The body is turned, oriented on the opponent, and the left leg is swept behind the right, so that the movement finishes with a right leg lead.

Spring – A movement that starts with the right foot forward. The left foot is brought along side the right, as if to “set in”, and is then driven off to the left. The body is turned, oriented on the opponent, and the right leg is swept behind the left, so that the movement finishes with a left leg lead.

Full Short Spring – A movement of the feet that starts left foot forward. The right leg is brought alongside the left before driving out to the right. The body is oriented on

the opponent and the left foot is “dragged” so that the movement finishes with the left foot leading.

Short Spring – A movement of the feet that starts right foot forward. The left leg is brought alongside the right before driving out to the left. The body is oriented on the opponent and the right foot is “dragged” so that the movement finishes with the right foot leading.

The Facing – The lead leg is move across in front of the rear leg before implementing a set or spring.

Lithely / Lightly – In general this term is used with no real purpose. However, it could also be used to suggest that the actions with which it is associated may need to be executed with extra agility (of body or mind), potentially to account for variables in terms of the distance between the fighter and the opponent.