

*“Angel Lancho”*; [Internet page]; translation from the Spanish text by Leonardo Bacarreza, Ph.D.; originally extracted from the magazine *Quinterías*, chapters 34, 35, 36, and 37; at <http://personales.gestion.unican.es/gutierju/BiografiadeAngelLancho.htm>; accessed 2016-08-21.

## Angel Lancho

But here begins another story. Angel Lancho himself tells it a few years later, in the introduction to the book he was writing, *Historia de esgrima*. Given the extension of this book, we select some pieces that look interesting for the purpose of this chapter, which is to determine the facts that led him to enter a *salle d'armes* for the first time and change his future.

### **From the memories of Angel Lancho (a summary)**

It was the year of 1898. A year of sad memory for all Spaniards due to the catastrophe of the war with the United States. Back then I was a young man of fifteen years of age, and I was desperate because I could not find a place to work. I wanted to help my blessed mother, as I had sworn before my father's corpse. I would attend any demonstration against the U.S. in Madrid. I just wandered through Madrid. I was confused, as if I had been hit by a club in the brain. All faces I saw bore the same utmost sorrow, the same deep sadness. After our defeat in Santiago de Cuba, I spent several days without going out. I felt stupefied. I did not want to play or to eat. I had almost forgotten my oath to my dead father: to work for my mother. But I was looking something that brought me relief. I read books, outdated newspapers where I occasionally found a note of temporary optimism. I could only read *"El Imparcial"* every day, and I did so from cover to cover. That's why, on July 17, 1898, I read the following ad:

“Strong young man needed. Puerta del Sol, 9. Salle d'Armes.”

I looked at myself in a small mirror at home, calculating whether or not my strength would be enough for what the ad required. I dressed in a navy blue suit, and went to that *salle d'armes*, at the mezzanine level of the house number 9 of Puerta del Sol. At the balconies of the house, a zinc sign read: *Salle d'Armes Sanz. Salle d'Armes*.

I had looked many times from the street towards those balconies. From the opposite curb it was possible to see those who went there to practice the art of arms. I climbed the stairs wondering if they would admit me as an apprentice at Maitre Sanz's *salle d'armes*.

It must have been about 4 pm on July 17, 1898, when I entered a *salle* for the first time. Adelardo Sanz, the Maitre, received me sitting on a chair, shirt-sleeved, and cutting the air with a sabre. His brother Alfredo was there too, not far from him. I went towards the closest person, my master, and asked:

"Is it here where you need a 15-year-old boy?"

"Yes," Sanz answered. "But you look a little foppish, kid."

I was bothered by the fact that this gentleman, who was seeing me for the first time, was treating me with such informality, but I thought that my life was just beginning, that I was indeed a kid, and that I had to suffer a lot before becoming a man.

Regarding the observation of my master about my looks, I responded:

"As you may understand, sir, that if I come to your house to apply for a job about which I read in 'El Imparcial' it's because I want to work, regardless of my bowler hat."

My master looked at me, then at his brother, and I, who had been following this movement, could observe that Mr. Alfredo Sanz made a gesture of approval.

"All right, man," my master told me. "Now I'm going to tell you the conditions to admit you, and if you like them, then you'll be here tomorrow at eight."

"Please do tell me," I answered.

"Your obligations will be to clean up the salle, to help the disciples, to take care of their clothes and weapons, to run any errand that is required, and to learn the profession. I pay 30 reales as your monthly income, and your meals."

This is how Angel Lancho, with fifteen years, started working and learning at Mr. Adelardo Sanz's salle d'armes. Five years later he was Spain's fencing champion. Maitre Sanz owned then the most prestigious salle in Madrid. He was the creator of the Modern Spanish Fencing School and the inventor of the Spanish sword. On November 25, 1895, he obtained the patent of invention for a foil and épée grip with curved quillons. As all innovators, Sanz faced a lot of opposition, but in time his method prevailed thanks to his work and the constant success of his disciples Ciriaco González Pacheco and, especially, Angel Lancho, his successor. Three years after starting his work at the salle, Lancho had already visited other salles in Madrid and beat any man who would face him sword in hand. At his fifth year, he was already national champion in Spain. He achieved glory little by little. His first trip to Paris took place in 1907, and there he fought with the best épée and sabre fencers. He beat Kischoffer, Rabau, Mimiagne, Denel, Rue, and others. He returned to Paris in 1909, and then he fenced Rouleau, Rosinol, Anchetti, and Galante. All of them were defeated by the master.

If 1904 was the year of championship, the next one was the year in which he obtained his title to teach fencing. When Maitre Sanz retired, Lancho opened his own salle at Ventura de la Vega street, with the help of his friend Enrique Chicote. At his salle he continued the work of his master, promoting the Spanish School that would end up prevailing. It is necessary to clarify that before Sanz the Italian and French schools had been the most notable. The Spanish sword used throughout the 17th and 18th centuries was the same sword used in other countries. The Italians still preserved it, with slight modifications. The quillons in ancient swords formed a perfect cross with the blade, and this prevented a proper grip. The French sword was quite precise and accurate, but, due to its lack of quillons, did not have as much power or command, and it was relatively easy to be disarmed. The Spanish sword was born with Sanz's invention in 1895, with

curved quillons that are distant from each other. In this sword, Sanz combined the precision and accuracy of the French sword with the power of the Italian sword.

These differences between the types of swords used in fencing, as well as the combat technique, originated many schools and deep rivalries between their followers. One that was especially famous was the rivalry and professional enmity between Lancho and another fencer, a follower of the French school, Maitre Afrodisio Aparicio. This rivalry brought them to a personal encounter with weapons. We will talk in another chapter about Lancho and Afrodisio.

Angel Lancho toured Spain and other countries in several occasions, holding tournaments and fencing exhibitions. With his successive victories, he established the supremacy of his style, of the Spanish blade, and of the Spanish school. He earned a new championship in an international tournament in Barcelona, he traveled and gained recognition in Portugal and in French Morocco, where, due to his merits, he was decorated with the Order of Oussam Alouite Chérifien.

Ángel Lancho was an outstanding figure in his time. A champion and a fencing master, and later a professor of fencing history at the Royal Conservatory of Music and Arts, where he was also elected Secretary. He also taught fencing to actors, because this skill was mandatory for them.

After the retirement of Maitre Sanz, he succeeded him as the head of the Spanish School. His *salle d'armes* was the most renowned of the period. The writer and journalist Antonio Díaz Cañavate describes it in these terms:

Located at the mezzanine of the house number 6 of Ventura de la Vega street, it consisted of a large hall with three balconies facing the street. The floor was covered with rubber mats, and the walls were decorated with masks and weapons: crossed sabres, foils, and épées. Under the masks, the large gloves. A small office, full of portraits, a dressing room, and a shower and bathroom completed the *salle*. Lancho's *salle* was a sort of intimate club. Men from different walks of life gathered there, especially writers such as Carlos Arniches, whose three children were Lancho's students.

Lancho's *salle*, like Sanz's and Afrodisio's, occupied an important place in everyday life in that period. They were the meeting point for the "manly" Madrid. They were a sort of mandatory course in social education. Many personalities frequented Lancho's *salle*: writers, journalists, artists, aristocrats, and politicians. It would be impossible to mention them all, but we can give some names: Carlos Arniches, Antonio Díaz Cañavate, Mariano Belliure (sculptor), Juan de la Cierva (the inventor of the autogiro<sup>1</sup>), Enrique Chicote (renowned actor), and journalists and directors such as Enrique Gómez Carrillo and Luis de Oteyza ("El Liberal"), Luis Montiel (Director of "Ahora", "As," and "Rivadeneira"), Alberto Insua (playwright), Campua (photographer and graphic reporter), the Count of Asmir, the Marquis of Monreal, and many other members of Madrid's elite.

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<sup>1</sup> A predecessor of the modern helicopter.

Continuing with Angel Lancho's biography, we remind our readers that in the first chapter we told how we gathered data for this story, and added four documents that gave us a global vision of this character: his birth certificate from Quintanar del Rey, his biography from the Espasa-Calpe encyclopedia, the Act from the City Hall of Quintanar in which he was declared an illustrious son of the city, and a chronicle from the newspaper "Heraldo de Madrid" that narrated Angel Lancho's visit to the city in 1924. In that occasion he held two fencing exhibitions along with Maitre Afrodísio Aparicio and some of their students. In the second chapter we told the master's family origins and his birth in Quintanar. He was the son of Don Pablo Lancho Martín, a surgeon who worked in the town for around 15 years until his untimely death at the age of 42 or 45. After this event and the relocation of the family to Madrid, Lancho entered the famous *salle d'armes* owned by Adelardo Sanz, founder of the Spanish School of Fencing and inventor of the Spanish blade with curved quillons. Lancho learned quickly and soon acquired the skills to fence the most famous Spanish and European masters, becoming Spanish fencing champion at 20. When his master retired, he opened his own *salle d'armes* where he continued the Spanish school until his death in 1939. But there is more to tell about Lancho. He was famous for his sword, but he was also loved and admired in the society of the period, being a friend of many personalities: composers, actors, football players, journalists, politicians, writers, etc. Now we will tell about this, about his marriage, his work at the Royal Conservatory of Music, and of other anecdotes.

Angel Lancho was already famous when he married Emma Martínez Bello on June 20th, 1918. The journalists of the day tell us of the event in "El Imparcial" and "El Heraldo":

El Heraldo de Madrid, June 21, 1918. Wedding of Angel Lancho.

The solemn marriage of Conservatory Professor and formidable *Maitre d'Armes* Angel Lancho and the beautiful lady Miss Emma Martínez Bello took place yesterday afternoon at the Parrish of La Concepción, located in Goya street. The bride, elegant and modest, highlighted her beauty with the emblems of the betrothed, wearing, among other jewels, a pair of beautiful earrings, gift of Mrs. Lancho, widow, and a bracelet with magnificent stones, a gift of the groom, who is now her husband. The witnesses of the wedding were, on the part of the groom, Mr. José Sánchez Guerra, ex Minister of the Government, Mr. Alfredo Sanz, Marquis of Vivel, and "El Lliberal" journalist Mr. Luis de Oteiza. The guests, the couple, the godparents and the witnesses held a reception at the Ritz Hotel, where a delicate *lunch*<sup>2</sup> was served.

The newlyweds left last night for El Escorial, from where they will return the day after tomorrow. Then they will travel to the Monastery of Piedra, to Zaragoza, and to Barcelona.

The fruit of this relationship was their daughter Emma Lancho Martínez, born on January 1st, 1920. At four, the girl accompanied her parents in their visit to Quintanar, in April and May of 1924. A second child, Angel, was born in July of that same year, but he died in August. Their third child, Rafael Lancho, was born in December 29, 1927. We contacted him to write this story, and he provided us with the documents and photographs that have helped us show to the present-day generation in Quintanar the value and merit of our compatriot. Rafael has come

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<sup>2</sup> In English in the original.

several times to the town, the last one during last February, then accompanied by his sister Emma. From the first visit we introduced him to Mrs. María Segura, a friend of his parents who still remembers some anecdotes of the period, such as the tournament Angel Lancho celebrated in Quintanar, and Lancho's constant visits to his childhood friend, Antoñete el Chinche. We pick up this opportunity to underline the re-encounter of the Lancho family with their father's town, and the friendship and love they have always shown for this country.

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Angel Lancho reached fame as a fencer, but his deep knowledge of the art also allowed him to obtain the position of Professor of Ancient and Modern Fencing History and its practice at the Royal Conservatory of Music and Declamation in Madrid. The evidence is his title of professor and member of this institution, dated November 16, 1917, validated by the General Direction of Fine Arts and the signature of its director, Mr. Mariano Benlliure, a famous sculptor and disciple of Lancho at his *salle d'armes*. His taking of office is signed by the director of the Conservatory, composer Tomás Bretón.

In 1921, he was named Secretary of the Conservatory. The Conservatory of Music of Cartagena also named him by unanimity Honorary Professor for his merits.

Maitre Lancho gave many interviews to newspapers of the period. He also wrote many articles. Lancho and his *salle* were the subject of many written pieces.

Antoni Díaz Cañavate tells us about Lancho's *salle d'armes* in his book *Historias de una taberna*, published by Austral. He also dedicates some pages to the subject in *Madrid y los madriles*, published by Prensa Española. Tesoro Publishers has dedicated some pages to Lancho, his *salle*, and the people who frequented it, in the book of memories of Alberto Insua. Luis Armiñán dedicates a full chapter of his book *El duelo en mi tiempo* to the duel between Sancho and Afrodísio.

Lancho is also the subject of the book *Galería*, which offers a hundred tales about the lives of extraordinary men, as told by themselves. This book is edited by Ediciones Caballero Audaz. We'll try and publish another article about this, because we want to publish all that was written about our compatriot to complete the little biography we have started. This is the intention of all of us who publish *Quinterías*: to rescue, for our town, the memory of this extraordinary character who was born in Quintanar, the town he was forced to leave due to the death of his father, but also the town he always held close to his heart, as we have shown in previous chapters.

Lancho, like other great fencing masters, never took advantage of his superior skill to confront people who were less gifted. They were, first of all, gentlemen, and our protagonist was one of the best. We have a sample of his chivalrous behavior from *Diario de la Marina*, from Havana. In the book *El libro de cómo se hacen las cosas*, p. 273 to 279, there is a section on how to use a sword:

Three things are needed to master a sword: will, will, and will.

And when it is mastered with the majestic art and elegance of master Lancho, you can accomplish what he has accomplished: fencing the best professors, earn a national championship, party in Paris, open a *salle d'armes*. But opening a *salle* and earning the title of Fencing Master requires another condition: the professor needs to be a gentleman.

One time, at the theater, some men at the balcony next door started bothering master Lancho and his friends. They insulted them, and master Lancho's friends waited for them at the door. The neighbors came out, saw them, and ran away. Only one of them walked towards the master--the first one he had pushed--and made the gesture of giving him his card.

"It's not necessary. Since you have such bad friends, who compromise your reputation and then leave you alone, from now on I am your friend."

A party was held a few days later in a theater, and master Lancho was giving a fencing exhibit there. When he was dressing up, he heard someone calling from the door.

"Who is it?

"Are you master Lancho?

"Yes, sir.

"I'm a member of the committee. I just wanted to let you know it's about time..."

Master Lancho came out. The committee member was astonished. It was the same man to whom he had wanted to give his card. He walked towards him and told him:

"Master, you are a gentleman."

And he certainly is.

## **Epilogue**

During three years and three chapters we have told the life of Angel Lancho and the events that made that son of Quintanar a famous and admired character, both in Spain and in the rest of Europe. A famous fencing master, Spanish national champion, professor and secretary of the Royal Conservatory of Music of Madrid... these are some of the merits that led the Espasa Encyclopedia to include in its pages the name of Angel Lancho.

As this story comes to an end, I would like to comment about the satisfaction shared by all the *Quinterías* team for the re-discovery of the figure of this champion. The satisfaction is especially mine, because I had the chance to meet the Lancho family, especially Angel's children Rafael and Emma. A deep friendship was born from those encounters, and through it they also discovered their father's town of birth.

Our work ends here. Angel Lancho has a street named after him. Our city hall has named him illustrious son. Today Quintanar has many houses named after flowers, kings, and poets. Why not one named after the most famous son of the town? The Cultural Association "Almendo" has requested publically to name the town's sports pavilion after the only elite sportsman born in this town, Angel Lancho.

We close this story with a chapter dedicated to Lancho and Afrodisio, both great fencing masters, supporters of two different schools, and, because of this, rivals first, and later good friends.

### **Lancho and Afrodisio**

Lancho's biography would not be complete if we did not tell about Afrodisio, the other great champion and a rival of our character. We need to tell about Afrodisio because his life was intimately connected to the one of the champion, and because they were the protagonists of a famous duel for the supremacy of their schools. A great friendship was born from that duel, and the Lancho-Afrodisio partnership was renowned in many tournaments and exhibitions in Spain.

In the first chapter we already told the story of Lancho's visit to Quintanar, and we told that in the occasion he came accompanied by his already inseparable friend Afrodisio. Masters Angel Lancho and Afrodisio Aparicio marked the Golden Age of Spanish fencing. In those times, Lancho and Afrodisio were to fencing what Joselito and Belmonte were to bullfighting. With different styles, Lancho was more elegant and orthodox. He was an academic of fencing, a great scholar in the matter, as Afrodisio himself would recognize later. Afrodisio was more athletic and spectacular. This contrast of styles made their encounters even more exciting.

At the beginning, the competition between schools (Lancho for the Spanish, Afrodisio for the French) led them to become rivals, even enemies, to the point that they held a duel by the sword at the Quinta de Noguera (now disappeared, but back in the day close to the present-day Manuel Becerra square) in Madrid. This duel, which took place on May 13, 1905, was presided by Mr. Alejandro Saint-Aubin, and the seconds were Mr. Luis de Armiñán and Mr. Juan B. Arregui, for Afrodisio, and Mr. Manuel Ruiz and Mr. Luis Morote for Lancho. In the occasion, Afrodisio was lightly wounded twice, so the mentioned gentlemen decided to end it, to avoid more damage and considering that, although offensive words had been exchanged, none of them compromised the honor of the contenders.

Mr. Luis de Armiñán, in his book *El duelo en mi tiempo*, dedicates a full chapter to the duel between Sancho and Afrodisio, in which he participated as second. He tells about it in full detail, underlining the courage and skill of both contenders. As a curious piece of information, he tells that a well-known and highborn lady, whose identity is not disclosed, bribed someone and found her way into the Quinta Noguera to witness the duel from a window, a circumstance that, naturally, was unheard of and logically prohibited.

The newspaper "*El Imparcial*" published the act of the duel on may 5, 1905. After this event, the enmity between the two men ended. Not only did they make peace, they also became members

of the same school, because Afrodisio adopted the Spanish school. They grew to be intimate friends as well.

After the reconciliation, they formed a highly requested partnership. No social event of relevance would conclude without a bout between Lancho and Afrodisio.

They participated in numerous national and international tournaments, giving Spanish fencing fame.

Their friendship extended to their families, and it was kept well after Lancho's death in 1939. A sample of this is the decision of her widow to give all the weapons and materials from Lancho's salle to Maitre Afrodisio as a gift. Another sample is the fact that Maitre Afrodisio was a witness in the marriages of both Lancho's children, Emma's (1942) and Rafael (1957).

Maitre Afrodisio Aparicio died in 1962. With the passing of the two great masters, fencing as a sport also started to fade in Spain.

*The biography of Angel Lancho Martín de la Fuente (1833-1939) has been taken from the magazine Quinterías, chapters 34, 35, 36, and 37. We wish to thank Mr. Octavio Tolosa Valencoso for his research about Master Lancho's biography. This work would not have been possible without his contribution. The design has been modified in this version to help the reader find subjects via Internet.*