

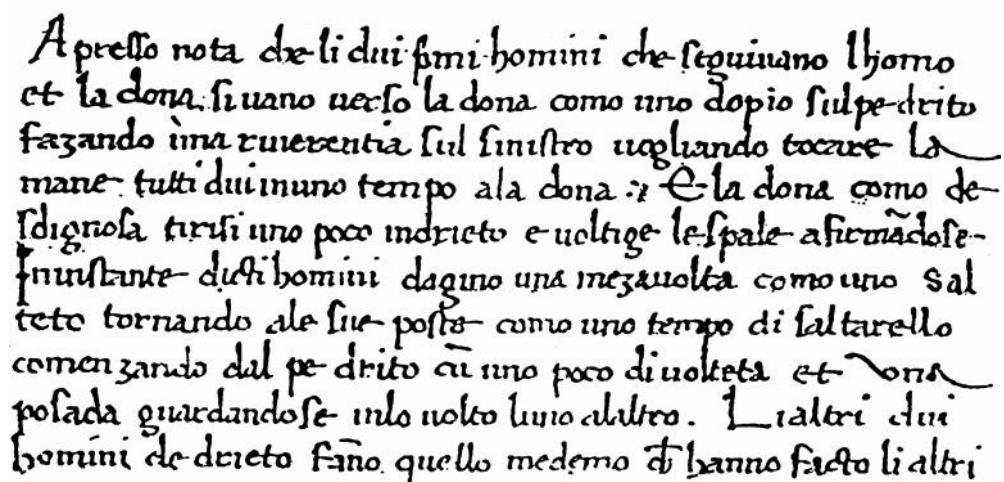
## There's many a Slip... Reading the 15th Century Italian Dance Manuscripts

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Between a choreographer's original concept and a later interpretation lie many opportunities for making a slip, even without a time gap of some five hundred years. We are all familiar with the pitfalls of notating a dance verbally: from first getting the choreography on to paper, to a subsequent interpreter's attempts to understand that text and translate it into the living, moving art form that is dance. How much greater must the problem be when dealing with a five hundred year old language, as exemplified in the manuscripts of the *quattrocento* dancing-masters?

### The manuscripts

The dozen or so manuscripts credited to these early renaissance Italian dancing masters contain the earliest choreographies – 101 *basse danze* and *balli* – that may be reconstructed with any degree of accuracy and are, therefore, greatly treasured by dance historians. Four of them may be termed original sources. The oldest is that of Domenico [Pd] – whom the others clearly regarded as the *maestro* – dating from *c.* 1455. (Figure 1) Two others are credited to Guglielmo Ebreo. The former, (Figure 2) finely written by Paganus Raudensis, [Pg] gives the completion date of 1463 below his signature. It is dedicated to Galeazzo Maria Sforza, the nineteen year old heir to the Duchy of Milan and contains the exquisite miniature of a man standing between two ladies, all dancing to the accompaniment of a lute. The later, [Pa] but not identical, version dates from the 1470s and is most elegantly presented under Guglielmo's christianised name of GiovannAmbrosio. (Figure 3) The fourth primary source is, like the Domenico, unique, partly because only one copy exists but mainly because it is **not** the product of a dancing master. Cornazano, courtier, poet, raconteur, military historian and self-acclaimed dancer, produced two copies of his treatise. The first, now lost, was, according to the dedication to Ippolita Sforza, written in 1455. The “second edition”, [V] still happily extant, dates from *c.* 1465 and was dedicated to Ippolita's half-brother, Sforza Secondo. (Figure 4)



Apreso nota de li dui fmi homini che seguivano l'omo  
et la dona. si uano uerso la dona como uno dopio sul pe drito  
fazando una ruerentia sul sinistro uogliando toccare la  
mane tutti dui in uno tempo ala dona. Et la dona como de  
dignola tirisi uno poco indietro e uoltige le spale a ficmandose  
in uolante d'uti homini daguno una mezuolta como uno sal  
teto tornando ala sue posto como uno tempo di saltarello  
comenzando dal pe drito cu uno poco di uolteta et uona  
posada guardandose inlo uolto luno alaltro. Li altri dui  
homini de dietro fanno quello medemo et hanno facto li altri

Figure 1. The Domenico manuscript - Pd: f. 22v

**I**n prima uadano insieme con tre tempi di saltarello todescho cominciando col pie sinistro et poi si fermino. Et poi lhuomo uada dalla man di sotto ella don. con vn doppio partendosi col pie dritto. et in quel mezo la dona stia ferma. et tutta questa parte. et tutto questo medesimo faciendo unaltra uolta tanto che lhuomo rimanga al suo luogo et po si fermano. et poi lhuomo si parta dalla donna con doi tempi di saltarello todescho et doi sempre et vn doppio partendosi col pie sinistro

Figure 2. The Guglielmo manuscript – Pg: f. 42

Imprima vadano in sieme con tri tempi di saltarello todescho. cominciando col pie sinistro et poi se fermino et poi lhuomo uada dalla man di sotto di la donna con vn doppio partendosi col pie dritto & in quel mezo la donna stia ferma & tutta questa parte medesima facciano unaltra volta tanto che lhuomo rimanga al suo luogo & poi se si fermano & poi lhuomo se parta dalla donna con doi tempi di saltarello todescho & doi sempre et vn doppio partendosi col pie sinistro & poi

Figure 3. The GiovannAmbrosio manuscript - Pa: f. 48v

The remaining treatises, and several shorter manuscripts, are all more or less accurate copies of Guglielmo’s works, though there is some evidence of intermediary texts in the inclusion, in certain manuscripts, of several different dances and in the occasional use of considerably altered or additional phraseology. None of these treatises includes any music.

Within these texts lie many opportunities for “making a slip” between the first reading and an ultimate reconstruction. Understanding and interpreting a verbal choreography presents many problems. Dancers and dance teachers will be familiar with the difficulties to be faced when attempting to describe a choreography in words. What we write today to record even a simple movement or step sequence may well be incomprehensible to us tomorrow. How much greater must the problem be when dealing with a five hundred year old language – even for those who read and speak its modern equivalent? Sometimes, indeed, that knowledge may compound the situation by suggesting misleading, 21st century, meanings. A would-be interpreter is faced with the need, first, to decipher the texts, then to understand their specialised vocabulary and, ultimately, to translate the result into a coherent, practical choreography.

**E**l danzare consiste in quattro principal misure. Prima. Saltarello. Quaternaria. e Balladanza. Prima non e altro che passi doppi atteggiati. e accelerati prestocca di misura che concreta el balladore a quello. Saltarello e il piu allegro danzare de tutti. et gli spagnoli el chiamano alta danza. consiste solo di passi doppi ondeggiato per releuamento del secondo passo tutto che batte in mezo de luno tempo e lalt.

Figure 4. The Cornazano manuscript - V: f. 5



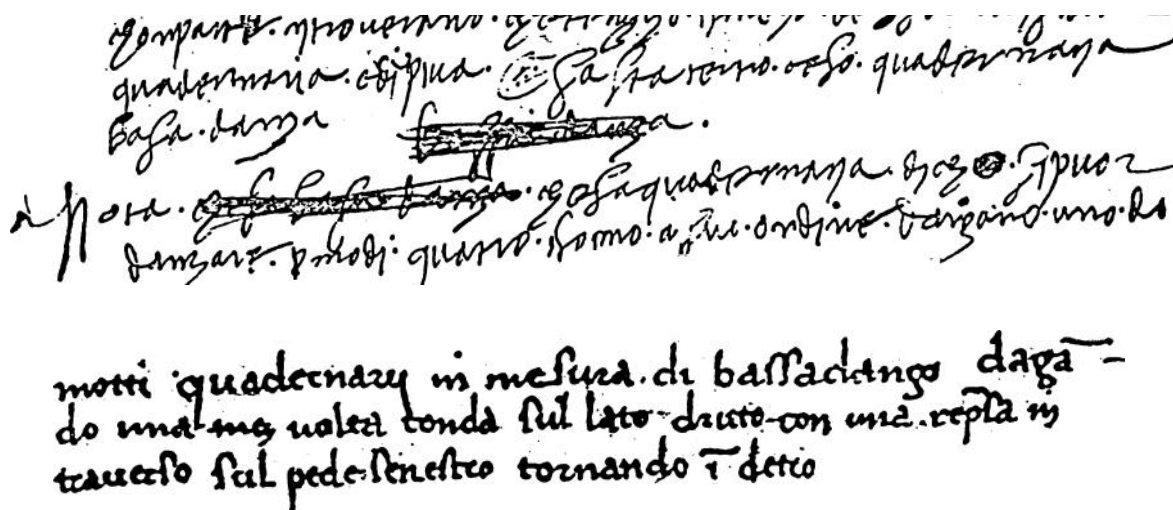


Figure 7. Corrections: scoring out from the Giorgio (NY: f. 35) and Domenico (Pd: f. 27v) manuscripts (second line, third word – mez)

### Scribal errors and Methods of correction

Anyone who has transcribed even a short passage of text is aware of the possibility of making a copy-error. It is scarcely to be wondered at, therefore, that one of the main problems in reading this material is the existence of scribal error. The 15th century scribes were no less conscious of the fact and, with the additional problem of not having reams of paper handy, made shift to allow for corrections to their writing. Three forms of this exist. An apparent fourth is, I suggest, the work of later hands.

The first, and possibly the rarest, correction method is the one most of us would use now – simply, to **score out** the offending mistake. But even such a simple act may remind us that the scribes are only human. One (Giorgio) seems to suggest a scribe in a temper; the other, with calm restraint, corrects a vital error. (Figure 7)

Another method is to **underline** or completely surround the error with a series of dashes or dots – quite misleading to the modern eye since we now use the same system of underlining to denote ‘retain’! (Figure 8)

A third form of correction deals with the sin of **omission**. Missing words, even short phrases, are squeezed in between the lines or, when more space is required, in the margin. Occasionally, the hand making such a correction seems not to be that of the original scribe – my fourth amendment method. But the principle of such insertions is well known to us and easily understood. (Figure 9)

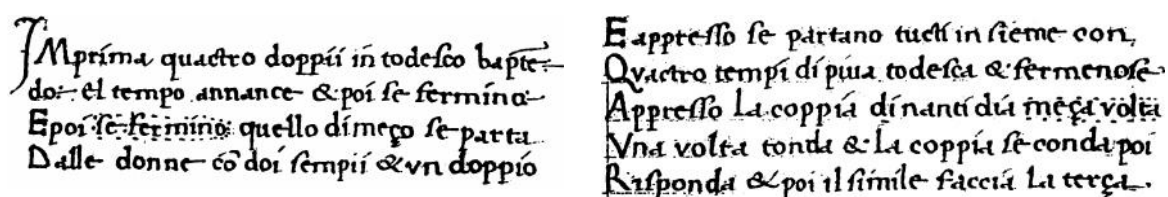


Figure 8. Corrections: Under-marking and surround dotting. a) Pa: f. 49; b) Pa: f. 46

**R**evoneta a ballo: eua in uno homo cum la dona  
 M<sup>prima</sup> fanno tempi quatro e mezo tutti <sup>dui</sup> amano de balladara  
 cae continentie due comenzando col pe sinistro, passi tri scempij: e  
 uno dopio cū una riverentia sul pe sinistro: e fanno questa p<sup>te</sup> due  
 volte tutti dui insieme: e fermale la dona.

Ora nota ch' lo homo ch' hauea p man la dita dona de dritto fa  
 tempo uno de saltarelo in misura quadernaria comenzando con lo  
 pequale aladina de pe dritto. et andagando dritto ale spalle de la dona de dritto vitrona  
 p<sup>te</sup> a la man sin d<sup>ra</sup> ch' e  
 l'omo de se ritroua ch'ose: e si ge eguale ala manne sua stancia con lo saltarelo. finito.  
 a p<sup>te</sup> la dona de d<sup>ra</sup>: Ancora nota che tutti homini e done se moueno facendo tempi  
 octo de p<sup>na</sup> luna chiopa dritto abaltia p ordine: e fermale

Ballo. di ianico. fannonera. in re. ballando  
 J<sup>mpima</sup>. fannonera. in re. ballando. in re. ballando. in re. ballando. in re. ballando.  
 J<sup>mpima</sup>. fannonera. in re. ballando. in re. ballando. in re. ballando. in re. ballando.  
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 J<sup>mpima</sup>. fannonera. in re. ballando. in re. ballando. in re. ballando. in re. ballando.

Figure 9. Corrections: insertions. a) Pd: f. 14v; b) Pd; f. 11v; c) NY: f. 36

Occasionally such omissions do remain unnoticed by the original scribe, as in the opening sequence of the *bassa danza*, Partita Crudele, in the Giorgio manuscript. Only one of the four sources gives what must be the complete text. (NY: f. 12) The other three omit the second *riverenza*, the presence of which, however, may easily be deduced from the clearly repetitive sequence.

Another error is that of **duplication or accidental intrusion**. One example that I find particularly amusing appears in the elegant, but sadly inaccurate copy of Guglielmo's manuscript found in Siena. Not so long ago, it might have called to mind a needle stuck on an old 78 record. In its own period, it conjures up a vision of a room full of highly studious scribes busy taking dictation. Not all are equally bright or attentive to the reader; not all as swift in copying. Perhaps there is one who mutters as he writes or even one who is rather hard of hearing. (Figure 10)

Imagine this scenario as the reader continues his dictation of Danza di Re (S: f. 76) – ‘dipoi fanno due passi scempij innanzi et uno doppio’. One slow and steady scribe mumbles as he writes – “Due scempij et uno doppio” – to be assiduously copied by his over-attentive neighbour who carefully transcribes every word he hears. “Was that “Due scempij et uno doppio?” asks a scribe at the back. Obliging, the reader confirms – “Yes – due scempij et uno doppio” – and so, our keen scribe in the front rank writes it down for a fourth time.

Ballo chiamato danza di Re  
tre ballano. ~

**I**l prima ladonna ua in  
nazi a tueti et gliuomi  
ni uanno pigliandosi perma  
no tueti edite gliuomini al  
passo primo sifa tempi dodici  
di salterello et dipoi fan  
no due passi scempij innan  
zi et uno doppo et due scem  
pij et uno doppio due scem  
pij et uno doppio due scem  
pij et uno doppio indietro  
et ladonna siuolta acolui

Figure 10. Multi-copy section from the  
Siena manuscript S: f. 76

al suo luogo et poi fanno due  
ripreses et il simile fa intorno  
a quello damano stancha to  
nando al suo luogo con due  
altre ripreses poi gliuomini  
fanno due passi scempij et  
due doppo cambiano cioe  
quello che e damano dricta  
ua alla mano sinistra poi  
fanno due ripreses et il simi  
le fa intorno a quello dama  
no stancha tornando al suo  
luogo con due altre ripreses  
poi gliuomini fanno due pal  
si scempij et due doppo cam  
biano cioe quello che e da



Figure 11. Duplicated section from the  
Siena manuscript S: f. 78

Also in Siena can be found an example of a lengthy and initially confusing duplication of a section of Rostibolli for 3, (S: f. 78) which the scribe entitles merely *Il Gioioso in terzo*, in itself a curious title. (Figure 11)

But Siena is not alone in demonstrating this type of error. Even the renowned Pagano achieved a similar textual duplication in his description of the *bassa danza*, *Cupido*. (Pg: f. 26) The scribe's eye obviously returned to the key word *donne*, but the wrong one. (Figure 12)

Even more intriguing is the insertion of a complete section of one dance within the text of another. Under the title *Alsandresca* (sic) (S: f. 44) in Siena – again! – we find, before the actual text of that dance, the beginning of another *bassa danza*, *Corona Gentile*. How does this happen? Perhaps from an original loose-leaf source where, as may occur when such pages are bound, the individual sheets are placed in the wrong order.

laltro & pigliansi per la man dritta et ua  
dano tondi con doi sempij & un doppo co  
minciando col pie sinistro. et poi faciano v  
na ripresa in sul pie dritto. Et poi glihuo  
mini uadano al contrario delle donne con  
doi doppo cominciando col pie sinistro. et  
in quel tempo le donne con doi doppo comi  
ciando col pie sinistro. et in quel tempo  
le donne faciano quattro continenze sul  
pie sinistro. et poi diano tutti meza uolta  
sul dritto. et faciano due riprese. vna sul



Figure 12. Duplicated section from the Guglielmo manuscript Pg: f. 26

COMICA·LIBRO·DELLARE·DEL·  
 DAZE I TITV LATO E POSTO P ANO IO  
 CORNAZAO·ALLA·ILLV·MADA·  
 HIPPOLYTA·DV·DI·GLABRIA·1455·

COMI(N)CIA · LIBRO · DELL( )ARTE DEL  
 DA(N)Z(AR)E I(N)TITULATO E (COM)POSTO · P(ER) ANTO(N)IO  
 CORNAZANO · ALLA · ILLU(STRIA) · MAD(ON)A  
 HIPPOLYTA · DU(CHESSA) · DI · CALABRIA · 1455

**Figure 13. Sample of abbreviations as seen in title of Cornazano's text. V: f. 3**

## Abbreviations

Abbreviations (Figure 13 and Table 1) can, initially, be quite a stumbling block to the inexperienced reader. Many are self-evident, once the convention has been understood; but many more are left unmarked, making them, initially, difficult to perceive. Those in most common usage are:

- ♦ the barred p, which represents the omission of various vowels all associated with an r, as p(er)fetto, rip(r)esa, pr(i)ma, sop(r)a;
- ♦ a vowel with a line above it, often casual rather than a clear tilde, to signify the omission of an n, m or en, as i(m)p(er)fetto, fondame(n)te;
- ♦ ch (the h with a bar through the upper part) to signify *che*;
- ♦ the strange mixture of q with what looks like a z that marks the omission of the subsequent u, as q(u)arto, cinq(u)e;
- ♦ and, very occasionally, a 9 as an abbreviation for 'con' as in *continenza*.

## Linked words and divided words

Unusual to our eyes is the habit, seen most frequently in Giorgio, of combining words into what looks like a single long word. Common at the time, this habit appears strange to us: as '*unaltraregola*' (NY: f. 6v) which breaks down into three words, or, at greater length, '*anchorasipuo . p(er)losuochontrario . fareunaltra . esperie(n)zia . inq(u)estoaltro . modo*'. (NY: f. 7)

**Table 1. The most common abbreviations**

Symbol	Full	As in
p̄	p(er), p(re), p(ri), etc.	rip(r)esa, p(ri)ma, etc
ā ē	am, an, em, en, etc.	te(m)po, i(m)p(er)fetto, co(m), ta(n)to, i(n)mezzo, co(n)
ch̄	che	
q̄	qu	q(u)ello, q(uarto)
9 -c	con	(con)tinenza

We have long been accustomed to the use of the hyphen and the habit of dividing words according to their natural syllables. Now, in a less grammatically conscious age, we grow accustomed to publications using strangely short lines to avoid splitting words or arbitrarily dividing them, apparently at random, to suit the requirements of line length. It should therefore be simple for today's readers to accept the *quattrocento* habit, found particularly in the Domenico and Giorgio manuscripts, of doing just that – starting a word at the end of one line and finishing it on the next. With practice, the reading of these 'broken' words becomes relatively easy: as in *poss / ibile*; *chominchia / ndo*; *qua / tro*; or the strange split of *dim / ezo* rather than the more logical *di mezo*.

One of these word divisions has an amusing twist. In Giorgio, (NY f. 15) the word *passetti* (little steps) occurs at the end of a line. The next line starts with "ini" – clearly not a word in its own right. The resulting complete word creates the double diminutive 'passettini' – very small steps.

## Spelling

Spelling presents yet another problem for the unwary. Understanding the context makes easy the differentiation between the variant spellings of the words for right (*dritto, diricto, ritto, ricto, destro, dextro, drecto*) and those for back or backwards (*drieto, dietro, diriet(r)o, detro, indietro, indrieto*). Even here, there is still the possibility for confusion as *dritto* (or *diricto, diritto*) may also mean straight – as used, for instance, when one dancer performs a *ripresa involta* (a ripresa making a half turn) while another does a *ripresa diritta* (without a turn).

## Verbal alternatives

The main manuscripts use three different words to signify left – *sinistro* – *mancho* – *stanco*. One must wonder, since *stanco* actually means tired or weary, whether there was once some subtle nuance that we no longer appreciate. Its usage brings to mind Caroso's statement, made over a hundred years later, that the *Riverenza* should be performed with the left foot because standing on the right gives greater stability. (Caroso: *Il Ballerino*: f. 4 – Regola II)

Another interesting set of verbal alternatives is the one denoting the lead dancer's position. This position is variously described as *a sinistra, sopra* or *innanzi* – on the left, above or in front. The correlation between these is substantiated in several choreographies. The contrary position, of the dancer on the right hand side, is variously termed *a destra, sotto* or *di drieto* – on the right, beneath or behind. The logic underlying these expressions comes from the practice, most frequently seen in *basse danze*, of having the lead person stand not only to the left of his/her partner but also slightly ahead. I have indicated elsewhere<sup>1</sup> that the third expression, *sopra / sotto*, probably derives from the frequently depicted handhold showing the man's or lead dancer's hand placed on top of, and therefore in front of, his partner's.

Unfortunately confusion can arise in interpreting these words when more than two dancers are involved. As three dancers turn to work their way up and down the room, we are presented with the intriguing description – "he who is *sopra*". Does this denote the original leader or the one currently standing on the left? The problem is compounded when the phrase appears in the past tense: "he who was *sopra*". Where there is doubt as to the answer, deciphering the rest of the dance can help – but is not always conclusive.



## Indications of direction

Another problem arises from the interpretation of the words denoting backward movement. In many of the dances, particularly the *basse danze*, formal indication of direction is scant. Progressive movement is clearly forwards, most frequently indicated by the basic verb *andare* (to go). However, directions for movement actually made backwards are not so easy to comprehend. The instruction, *tirinsi indietro* – draw back – clearly refers to a backwards movement, usually quite small, as in the occasional request for two *passetti* or *passettini* after a *riverenza*. But the words – *tornando indietro* or *ritornando* – turning back or returning – only occasionally denote movement actually made backwards. The more usual interpretation is ‘turning round to move towards the rear’. English offers the same ambiguity. The direction ‘go back’ can be interpreted as both movement backwards or as a return to place made by turning round and going – forwards – towards the back. What is certain is that any lengthy movement towards the back must be danced forwards.

Instructions to the dancers to move in opposite directions (*al contrario*) and to meet again (*in contro*) are, for the most part, quite clear. Use of the parallel terms *in su* and *in giù* (literally upwards and downwards) which refer to a dancers’ progress forwards along the line of dance or back towards the original starting point, is less certain. Although the terminology is precise, the scope for error is obvious. That a scribe may copy wrongly is easy to understand; that a fault may arise from consideration of the direction in which the dancers are facing at any given moment offers a different explanation for a possible mistake. A dancer moving towards the back of the room is still, essentially, moving forwards.

A parallel ambiguity arises from the various expressions denoting a turn. If **you** were asked to ‘turn round’, how far would you turn? This may remind us that we should not complain when faced with the same question in these choreographies. Although a *doppio involto* will naturally make a full turn, a *ripresa involta* is clearly intended to make only a half turn. There are enough concordances with directions for a *mezza volta* (half turn) leading into a *ripresa* to make that certain.

The words *volta tonda* always indicate a full turn but the interpretation of the direction of that turn will depend upon the musical measure. In the faster tempi, whatever the steps, the turn will, consistently and naturally, follow the leading foot, left to the left and right to the right. However, the *volta tonda in bassadanza* is a case apart. It is mentioned frequently by the masters as something to be studied – implying the need for such study.

Although the step sequence of two *scempii* and one *ripresa* remains consistent, Domenico may well have made the turn more slowly than the later masters. This faster turn apparently led to the introduction of a new name – *volta del gioiosa*. However, it is the direction of the turn that is the point of contention. Should the steps for a *volta* be anything other than two *scempii* and a *ripresa*, the turn will follow the general rule. However, when the turn is to be made with those specific steps, in *bassadanza misura*, the turn should be made to the left, beginning with the right foot. I believe that the sentence that ends Cornazano’s description of Verçeppe is a general reminder to the dancers, not a comment specific to that one dance. “But note, that this *volta* begins with the left foot because it is not in *bassadanza* measure.” (V: f. 19) Cornazano is drawing attention to the musical measure – *quadernaria in piva* – and emphasising that the dancers must turn to the left with the left foot precisely **because** of that. The corollary must be that, in *bassadanza* measure, the dancer would turn to the left with his right foot.

## Textual comparison

Occasionally, the presence of a scribal error can be detected by the use of a standard phrase that has apparently been misapplied. For example, *riprese* frequently occur in twos, fairly consistently described with the stock phrase – *due riprese una sul sinistro et l'altra sul dritto* – one to the left and the other to the right. In the *bassa danza*, Corona, in the Domenico manuscript, (Pd: f. 27v) two *continenze* are described, quite normally, as ‘beginning with the left’. The text then continues ‘the other on the right’. (*Apresso doe continentie cominciando col senestro l'altra sul dritto*) Since this phraseology is not usually associated with *continenze*, the reader may feel justified in assuming the scribal omission of two *riprese* following the *continenze*. Reference to Cornazano’s version of the same dance (V: f. 32v), where two *riprese* are asked for, may safely be taken as confirming the amendment rather than indicating a later, or idiosyncratic alteration.

The value of such textual comparison in confirming the existence of a possible error can also be seen in the *bassa danza*, Cupido. Towards the end of the dance, in the Guglielmo / Pagano manuscript, (Pg: f. 26) interestingly echoed by Siena, (S: f. 50) the dancing couple are asked to move around each other (*intorno*) with two *scempii* (single steps). However, in Ambrosio’s text (Pa: f. 29v–30v), as in the three other copies of this dance, the directional instruction for the same two *scempii* has the couple moving **towards** (*incontro*) each other: a more logical reading since, at that moment, the dancers stand some two *doppii* apart.

The identical error occurs in the *ballo*, Leggiadra. Once again, the Pagano-Guglielmo text (Pg: f. 33v) contains the faulty version while Ambrosio (Pa: f. 38v) and all later copies give the correct one. However, Pagano’s subsequent instruction makes clear his omission – *cioè tramezzando luna copia dentro l'altra* – that is, one couple passing through the other. Interestingly, the description is of a repeated sequence – and all manuscripts give the correct version the first time through.

## *Continenze in sul sinistro*

The same moment in Leggiadra presents another problem, that of how to perform a sequence of four *continenze*. Should these be danced alternately on the left and right feet as is the case when the more common two *continenze* are mentioned or might the instruction *in sul sinistro*, (on the left, or, possibly, towards the left) normally associated with *riprese*, rather imply continuous movement towards the left? When four such *continenze* occur in Leggiadra, two couples stand face to face, about to pass through the other – as referred to above. If the four *continenze* are indeed all made to the left – and remember that these are tiny steps – then the couples become slightly offset, the better able to pass through each other.

Of course, this realisation also depends upon the interpretation of the original instruction to the dancers that they should “pass one couple through the other” – a phrase which might be taken literally as one couple, together, passing between the other. However, two points may rather indicate that the four dancers pass through as individuals. The first is the clarification attached to the parallel, return move – *cioè tramezzando luna coppio all'altra*. This phrase is most commonly used to describe one person passing between two others but also is used to describe a weaving pattern, as seen in Patienza or Colonnese. The second is that there is no indication, in any of the manuscripts, of which couple should pass through the centre first: an unlikely omission.

A similar, surely deliberate use of four *continenze*, all to the left, occurs in the *ballo Voltati in çà Rosina* (Pa: f. 50) where three dancers are involved. Each time the four *continenze* occur, the relationship between the three dancers adjusts subtly as the *continenze* close the “horizontal gap”, recentering the triangular relationship after a single *ripresa* to the right has offset their positions. The validity of this device is most obvious when, in the third section of the *ballo*, a *ripresa* to the right has placed the man close to one of the ladies to permit him to touch hands with her in a *riverenza*. The *continenze*, all danced to the left, then bring the dancers back into their balanced, triangular set.

A third example of this strategic use of four *continenze* occurs in the *bassa danza*, Cupido, danced *alla fila*, in a file of couples<sup>2</sup>, rather than of individuals. After a handed turn that ends with the dancers facing each other up and down the line of dance, they move sideways with a *ripresa* to the right before the men move towards the rear while the ladies do four *continenze* all to the left. At the end of this separation, all make a half turn, on the right foot, into two *riprese* and a *riverenza* before returning to each other. It is clear that the four *continenze* once again serve the highly useful purpose of closing the “horizontal” gap created by the original move sideways.

Such grouped *continenze* bear comparison, choreographically, with the four *mezze riprese*, also danced sideways, in *Tesara*, *Sobria* and *Bialte di Castiglia*. We might also consider, in this context, the curious revision of terminology that has apparently occurred, a hundred years later, when *continenze* and *riprese*, according to Caroso and Negri, seem to have changed their names.

But the problem with *continenze* does not stop there. There are references, most frequently in Siena, to ‘*una continenza*’. How should this be interpreted? Is the dancer, indeed, meant to perform only the one movement or should the phrase be read as a request for the standard, composite action of *due continenze*? The number of parallel texts asking for two *continenze* would seem to confirm such a possibility. A single reference to a *continenza integra* might suggest that such a solution is correct or may even indicate an early occurrence of the later reversal of terminology.

## Vocabulary

Once we enter the realm of vocabulary, we encounter many problems. The first of these is Domenico’s reference to the various steps and movements as being either *naturali* or *accidentali*. (Pd: f. 2v) Their apparently easy translation is misleading since they are neither ‘natural’ nor ‘accidental’. Domenico makes clear that the so-called ‘natural’ steps are those that occur *on the beat*. The use of the words *passi naturali* and *passi di natura* in later manuscripts must, to some extent, reflect Domenico’s definition.

The inessential or embellishing movements are termed *accidentali* because they occur in the *vuodo* or upbeat of the music. The technical terms for these *movimenti accidentali* are also difficult to interpret. First is the *frappamento*, an ornament to the *doppio in quadernaria*. The word has several meanings among which are to knock or to rap, but also to cut up into small pieces, which may, therefore, seem a likely description of faster footwork occurring on sub-divisions of the main beat of the tempo. There may be a pre-echo of the later 16th century *saffice* in here. Second is the *scorsa*. Perhaps we may be forgiven for again seeking an answer in the works of Caroso and Negri and their descriptions of *scorsi*, the smaller, quicker steps danced as sub-divisions of the basic *passi*. Finally, and most comprehensibly,

comes the *cambiamento*, which, both from its meaning and its usage, denotes a quick change-step, as in a sequence of *doppii* on one foot.

More puzzling are the words used to describe the perfect style to be adopted by the dancer. *Ondeggiare* is relatively easy to understand, particularly as Domenico (Pd: f. 1v) likens the body movement in the performance of a *doppio* to the slow rise and quicker fall of a gondola on calm water. Cornazano confirms this by asking the dancer to ‘rise gracefully on the second short step’ (V: f. 3v-4). This is associated with *aiere*, one of the six principles of dance mentioned by the masters, which, in this context, must denote lightness of movement. *Ombreggiare* is generally translated as ‘shading’ – but of what and how remains unclear. Guglielmo mentions it as one of the qualities of *maniera* (the principle of manner or dance-style), a turning or flanking movement of the body as a step is made. The term also denotes the action of a horse when it shies sideways – and, therefore, could be intended to denote the rising, turning movement of the body that is an essential part of the *doppio in bassadanza*. Of course, there is much contention as to the manner of that movement, not everyone interpreting it as unilateral in action.

Associated with these is the equally curious word *campeggiare*, used by Cornazano in his description of the action of dancing a *doppio*. It derives both from military terminology, implying setting up one’s standard to mark one’s position, and from painting, where it is associated with background colouring. Florio adds the meaning ‘to show well’ which has a clear significance for a dancer.

Among the dance terms are many of doubtful meaning. Some may be relatively simple to interpret, given either some cross-referencing within the texts or some other, non-dance aligned, meaningful usage. One such is the description of the various forms of *ripresa* as *in portoghalese* or *in gallone*. It has been accepted that these represent a diagonal form of the sideways *ripresa*. That these steps are often described also as moving forwards or backwards may be taken as justification of this; firstly, because the word *gallone* translates as chevron and, secondly, because of its dialect usage denoting a woman’s hip as she supports a child.

Similarly incomprehensible, despite its being apparently meaningful to the modern reader, is the ornamented form of the *doppio* and *ripresa* known as *gallopato*. We may confidently assume that such steps were in some manner skipped or hopped. But the actual nature of that gallop must ever remain unconfirmed. The interpretation of the *doppio pediando* is even more uncertain, although it appears to have a connection with following someone.

The qualification to the *doppio* – *battendo il tempo* – also remains of doubtful interpretation. That it should include some form of, presumably, audible beat may happily be assumed. The nature of that beat – a stamp or perhaps a clap of the hands – is unknown. Some assistance may be taken from Cornazano’s expression in Leoncello Nuovo in tre where he asks for a tempo of saltarello to be danced *battendo la botta sul sinistro* – beating the rhythm on the left (foot). Of no help in resolving the problem are the occasions where parallel texts give variant instructions – as in Partita Crudele and Caterva. In both these cases, while some manuscripts require the tempo of *saltarello* or *saltarello todesco* to be beaten, others clearly specify that it should be *non battendo*.

## Conclusion

It is not surprising, therefore, that many problems lie in wait for the unwary interpreter. The basic nature of the dance descriptions lures us into assuming an understanding we may not have. The apparent simplicity of the terminology, some of it not unfamiliar to us today, too easily leads us into accepting interpretations that may not be entirely valid. The existence of textual variations between the Domenico manuscript and later sources might be assumed to be scribal errors but such variations may rather indicate an ongoing change or development in dance style – or simply local preference. The several forms of *contrapassi* are a case in point<sup>3,4</sup> and the different references to them certainly seem to imply a gradual change in the manner of their performance. The obvious existence of scribal errors affords us an all-too-easy and highly dangerous route to the simple solution of assuming such an error when we find it difficult to resolve the text into an actual dance.

However, provided we are not afraid to admit that our modern 21st century reconstruction can never be a perfect presentation of the 15th century dancing-master's original intention, we can aim to preserve the original spirit of the dance. As Ian Anderson, a modern composer, has said: once someone has given a piece of music to the world, it takes on a life of its own. Each performance is unique and each performer's contribution is, in some sense, valid where the intention is honest.

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