

— Reflections on Basse Dance Source Material —

A Dancer's Review

Peggy Dixon

Preface

This is the first part of Peggy Dixon's article. Part II, published in the previous edition of this journal, looked particularly at the information provided in the major sources, the Brussels manuscript, the Toulouse incunabulum, and the 16th century books of Arena and Arbeau relevant to the performing of basse dances. In Part I, now presented, earlier basse dance source material is described, and Brussels and Toulouse discussed as documents.

PART I

Introduction

The material to be discussed below is not new. Some of it has been in the public domain for over a hundred years. But it has lain widely scattered among books and journals primarily concerned with musicological or bibliographical studies.

The aim of this article is to collect together information about the source material of the basse dance and take a fresh look at it from the dancer's point of view.

The Nancy Basse Dances, 1445

Let us first take the Nancy Basse Dances of 1445, (Paris, Bib. Nat. f. fr. 5699, formerly f. fr. 10279).

This material was brought to light when Auguste Vallet de Viriville published in 1859 a collection of edited manuscripts under the title *Chronique de la Pucelle*.¹ The title is that of one of the constituent items, attributed by Vallet to Guillaume Cousinot, Seigneur of Montreuil (died in the 1480's, aged about 80).

The manuscript containing the basse dances is, Vallet tells us, a copy of a *Geste des Nobles Francoys* by an earlier Guillaume Cousinot (d. 1442 aged over 70), Chancellor of the Duchy of Orleans. The manuscript which Vallet inspected is a copy of the original and was made, he surmised, not long after the date of the original, which he gives as 1429/30.

The copy in question was made for Jean of Orleans, Count of Angoulême (1399–1467), and is annotated extensively in Jean's hand, the basse dances occurring on the reverse of the first flyleaf.

The Nancy Basse Dances in a wide perspective

Looking at the material in a wide perspective the questions which arise are, who wrote it, when, where, why, and even, how? Vallet himself gives us satisfactory answers to the first three. The writer was Jean d'Orleans, Count of Angoulême, and if he did not actually write it at Nancy, capital of Lorraine, in the spring of 1445, what he wrote referred to events there and then. The occasion was the celebration of the forthcoming marriage with Henry VI of England, of Margaret, daughter of Rene, Duke of Anjou, Bar, and Lorraine, Count of Provence, and King of Naples and Sicily. The King of France himself, Charles VII (Jean of Arc's 'dauphin') was there, and so were all the personages listed below, and presumably referred to in the basse dance titles.

<i>de bourgogne</i>	Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy from 1419–1467.
<i>la reyne de cessile</i>	Isabelle of Lorraine, wife of René, and hence also nominally at least, Queen of Sicily. The title was however, disputed by the House of

Aragon, who were firmly in place in the person of Alphonso I, the Magnanimous, King of Naples and Sicily (d. 1458).

de bourbon Charles, first Duke of Bourbon, husband of Philip the Good's sister, Agnes.

ma dame de calabre Marie de Bourbon, daughter of Charles and Agnes, was married to René's son Jean who, as heir to the throne of Naples and Sicily, would have had the title Duke of Calabria. There was, of course, another contender, Alphonso's son Ferdinand, later to become King Ferdinand I, called 'Ferrante'.

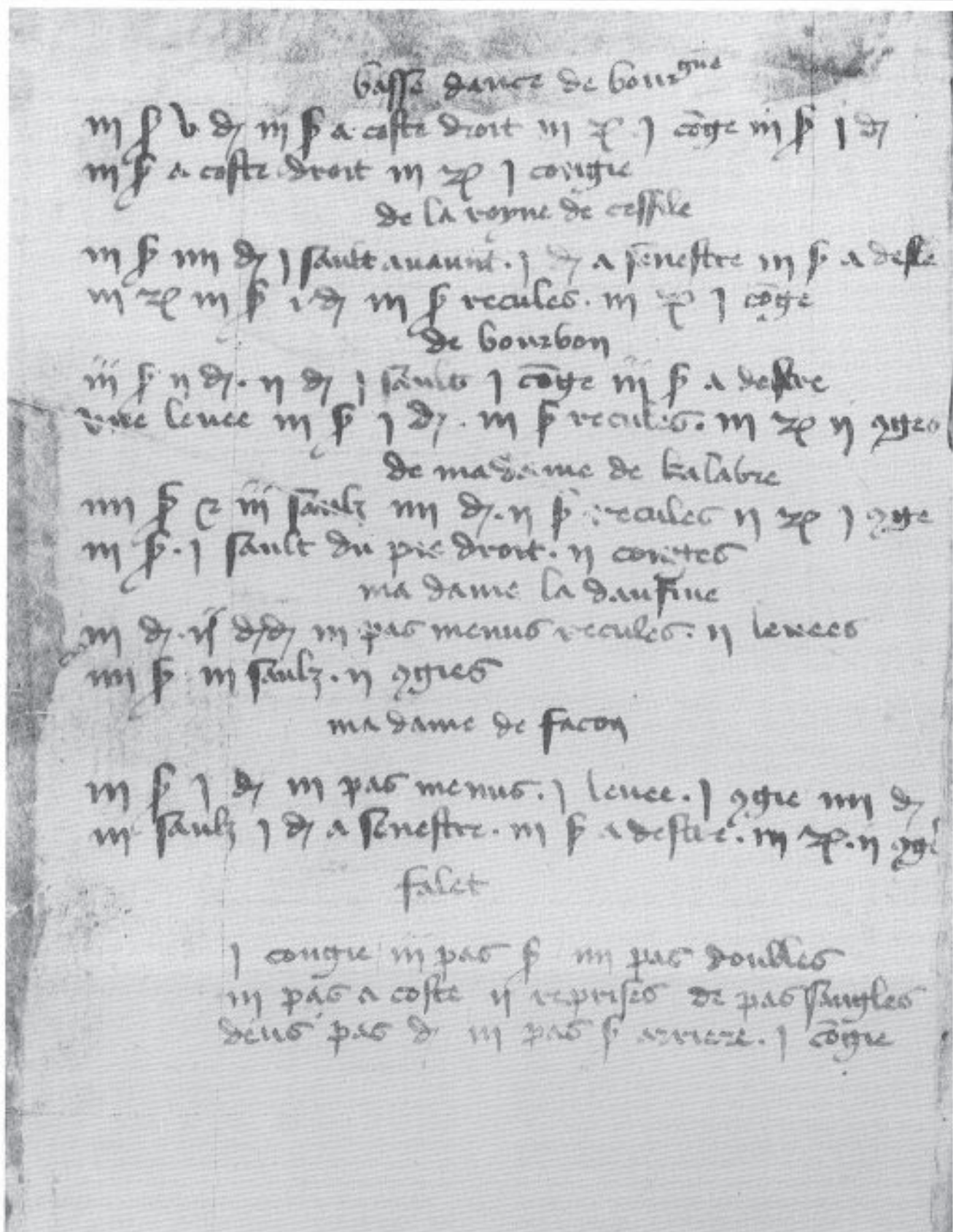
madame le daufine Margaret of Scotland, wife of the Dauphin, Charles VII's talented and unruly son, later to become Louis XI.

The other dance titles have not been identified, although Vallet has two suggestions to make in respect of *falet*. One is that it might refer to some member of a family of the name of *Falet* which was flourishing in Burgundy about that time. The other that this dance referred not to a person at all, but to a role similar to that of the *sot*, or *fol*, or *fallet*, or *falet*? whose comic turn by tradition served to bring mystery plays to a close. Jean of Angoulême joined this gathering at Nancy on 26 April 1445, following his release from a 32-year imprisonment in England. Most of these people continued to consort together from May 19 at Chalons, until 16 August 1445, on which date the little dauphine Margaret died. However, it is not known if Jean was present at this later gathering, and it is known that on June 22 he was in Paris.² It seems likely, therefore, that the notes were made some time between April 26 and late May, at Nancy, but it is also just possible that the place might have been Chalons and the date a month or two later. (Genealogical tables showing the relationship of these people to one another and to the crown of France are given in the appendix.)

Why did Jean make a record of the dances? Was it intended to serve as a brief for future reconstruction of them? Or was it just a memento of a dazzling occasion. (Paul Murray Kendall gives a very readable description of the occasion in his biography of Louis XI.)³ It must have been an overwhelming experience for Jean after the austerity of his long imprisonment. For his had not been a nominal confinement as was that of his brother Charles, Duke of Orleans, the poet, who had the company of the prisoners of war taken at Agincourt. Jean was a hostage of the Duke of Clarence for debts incurred on behalf of the Orleans brothers by their uncle Jean, Duke of Berry, the art collector and connoisseur. Jean of Angoulême had only two loyal servants as companions of his imprisonment.⁴

And how was Jean able to write out the sequence of the dances? He surely could not simply have remembered the steps. Were they dictated? Or copied? From the irregularities in the spelling and wording it seems likely that he was copying from more than one source, or to more than one person's very detailed dictating. There are yet wider questions. How were the dances performed? Were they quite separate dances, any one of which might have been selected for performance at any time? Or were they a suite?

In first introducing the material to the public, Vallet sees it as a single piece, the different sequences representing the steps of different dancers taking part; four ladies and two men, he observes. Vallet refers to it as a "programme of a ballet danced by the princesses of the blood royal".⁵ This idea is then enshrined as a title above the material, in his edition of it in the *Chronique*, with no indication that the title is entirely his own contribution. This piece of editorial work is typical of the accretions of pure conjecture that become attached to data of Early Dance, taking on in time the solidity of established fact.



The Nancy Basse Dances. Photo Bibl. nat. Paris Fr. 6599 fol. iv.

As is generally known and regretted, whilst chroniclers often refer to dance, it is only fleetingly, simply telling us that it took place. If they expand this at all, it will only be to say who danced, what they wore, how long they danced, never precisely what they did. Frederick Crane, in his *Materials for the Study of the Fifteenth Century Basse Danse*, draws attention to and quotes from two entries by chroniclers relating to the festivities at Nancy in 1445.⁶ In the first, Mathieu d'Escouchy writes of festivities generally, saying (in the transcription of his *Chronique* by G. du Fresne,) "y

eut fait plusieurs grans et solennelz esbatmens, tant de danses, joustes, boires, mangeries, comme autres, et par moult journees"⁷ ("there took place several big, impressive festivities such as dancing, jousting, wining and dining etc over many days"). In the other, Georges Chastellain in *Le Pas d'Armes de Jacquet Lelaing* (as edited by Kervyn de Lettenhove) writes, "*apres le banquet, chacun se prit a danser et a faire feste; trompettes et menestreaux ne cesserent de cornier jusques aupres du jour pour mieux resbaudir la feste, chevaliers et dames, de chanter, danser, et deviser les uns aux*

autres . . .”⁸ (after the banquet everyone began to dance and make merry; trumpeters and minstrels did not stop playing till nearly dawn, the more to enliven the festivities, knights and ladies singing and dancing and entertaining one another”). In both cases the editor has supplied, as it happens, misleading information in footnotes. Du Fresne tells readers that Vallet published in his edition of Cousinot “the programme of a ballet written probably by the hand of the Count of Angoulême, on the first guard sheet of the ms”.⁹ Kervyn, similarly, says Jean “wrote, himself, the programme of a ballet for the festivities at Nancy”.¹⁰

It is a short step to assuming that Jean “wrote” a ballet, not just a memo. And indeed in the entry on Jean of Angoulême in the *Dictionnaire de Biographie Française* (Paris, 1936) Jean Balteau states that on his return to France Jean composed a ballet which was danced either at Chalons or at Nancy before the King in 1445. Even nowadays Ingrid Brainard, in her writings on basse dance, still, though qualifying the description with a “so called” or a “known as”, uses the terms *Bal* or *Ballet de la Reine de Cessile* to designate this material.¹¹

The Nancy Basse Dances – a close focus

In the following transcription an attempt has been made to reproduce the layout and the observed punctuating marks including dashes, not dots, over some, not all, of the i’s. The spelling and punctuation marks of the original has also been maintained.

basse dance de bour^{gne}

ijj s v d iij s a coste droit iij Z j co^{ge} iij s j d
 iij s a coste droit iij Z j congie
 de la reyne de cessile
 iij s iiii d j sault avaut. j d a senestre iij s a destre
 iij Z iij s i d iij s recules . iij Z j co^{ge}
 de bourbon
 iij s ij d . ij d j sault j co^{ge} iij s a destre
 une levee iij s j d . iij s recules . iij Z ij 9ges
 de madame de calabre
 iij s & iij saulz iij d. ij s recules ij Z j 9ge
 iij s. j sault du pie droit . ij congies
 ma dame la daufine
 iij d . ij dd iij pas menus recules. ij levees
 iij s iij saulz . ij 9gies
 ma dame de facon
 iij s j d iij pas menus. j levee . j 9gie iij d
 iij saulz j d a senestre. iij s a destre . iij Z . ij 9g
 falet
 j condie / iij pas s / iij pas doubles
 iij pas a coste / ij reprises / de pas sangles
 deus pas d / iij pas s arriere . j. co^{ge}

Frederick Crane has given reliable transcriptions of the material, each dance under its own title, in his *Materials for the Study of the Fifteenth Century Basse Danse* (Assen, 1968). This book is a bible for students of the basse dance, listing all fifteenth century sources at present known and saying where and what they are and who has written what about them; then listing all the basse dances from all the sources, in alphabetical order, twice over, first giving an edition of the notes and/or steps, and then again giving for each dance the sources in which it is contained, with comments, and bibliography. Transcriptions and translations of the verbal material on the technique of the basse dance are given, and there is also a chapter on the dance tunes compared with their sources, and another on the basse dance in art. The bibliography is very extensive. In the case of the Nancy Basse Dances, Crane’s editorial alterations are confined to adding some accents, writing out contractions, and supplying capital letters in appropriate places. Vallet’s previous editing of the material, its first public presentation, had gone further than this, expanding abbreviations, writing out contractions, adding words, changing words, substituting Arabic numerals for the lower case Roman, and elevating titles to capital letters throughout.

There are some differences in the reading of the symbols:

Madame la Daufine at the beginning: I read iij d, as does Crane, Vallet gives 4 d.

Madame la Duafine the *pas menus recules*: I read iij, as does Vallet, Crane gives ii.

Falet after the two reprises: I read *de pas (sangles)* as does Vallet (writing *simples* not *sangles*), Crane gives *deus pas (sangles)*.

Curt Sachs, presenting the material in his *World History of the Dance* (New York, 1937) follows Vallet, in translation, and has concluded that the ii *reprises de pas sangles*, however it may have been written originally, means “2 reprises, 2 simples”. Crane’s alteration of *de* to *deus* also implies this. Such differences are minor, and not likely to affect the credibility of any dance reconstruction attempted which will in any case have to lean very heavily upon imagination and knowledge culled from elsewhere.

It is the latter which illuminates the s, d, and Z as simple, double, and *démarche/reprise* and the congé, in all its various spellings and contractions, as the congé/branle. Of the Z, a cross between a 2 and an r, Capelli’s *Dizionario delle Abbreviature*¹² gives, for its meaning when standing alone, *etiam*, which embraces “and”, “as yet”, “still”, “even now”, “again”, “furthermore”, “certainly”. It is tempting to think of this as a first usage of the dance teacher’s ubiquitous “and” but I would suggest that “again” is a better choice of meaning for us, with its suggestion of a retake. The symbol is used in the Brussels and Toulouse sources in the choreographies of the dances given, the text establishing the meaning as *démarche/reprise*.

The Nancy Basse Dance material itself, from close scrutiny, yields the following observations and questions.

The Z, when it occurs, is always in the same quantity as the preceding step, viz:

<i>bourgogne</i>	iij s a coste droit	iij Z
<i>cessile</i>	iij s recules	iij Z
<i>bourbon</i>	iij s recules	iij Z
<i>calabre</i>	ij s recules	ij Z
<i>facon</i>	iij s a destre	iij Z

The sault, when it occurs, is always j or iij, viz:

<i>cessile</i>	iiij d	j sault
<i>bourbon</i>	ij d	j sault
<i>calabre</i>	iiij d	ij saulz
and	iij s	j sault
<i>daufine</i>	iiij s	ij saulz
<i>facon</i>	ij d	ij saulz

The levees, when they occur, are always fewer in number than the preceding step, viz:

<i>bourbon</i>	iij s a destre	une levee
<i>daufine</i>	iij pas menus recules	ij levees
<i>facon</i>	iij pas menus	j levee

The later basse dance books tell us to read the symbols sequentially. But the later basse dance books do not admit of the existence of saults and levés, (springs and risings). Could it be that these terms should be read not sequentially but as a qualification? Could the iiij d j sault in *cessile*, for example, be read not as “four doubles, one spring”, but as “four doubles, one of them sprung”? Is the levee the same thing as the sault, only less so? Or is it a rise back to the normal position after a decline? Since we have two levees together in *daufine* the latter would seem to be ruled out, unless we read the symbols non-sequentially. One cannot come back to normal twice without departing from it in between. Perhaps we must accept the levee as an incipient spring.

But if we do read the signs non-sequentially and take the sault and levee as qualifications and not as steps, then Hertz’s comment in *The Basse Dance, Its Evolution circa 1450–1550*¹³ would not be valid. Hertz says, “With the exception of the first dance” (logically he should also have excepted the last, *falet*), “these choreographies cannot be viewed as *bassedances*, not because they violate the Brussels *mesure* theory but because they contain saults”. Hertz goes on to state that the “leap is contrary to the nature and even to the name of the basse dance”. But is it? The answer depends upon one’s interpretation of the key phrase, “sans soy demener le plus gracieusement que on peult”,¹⁴ discussed in the previous journal.

Crane on the other hand, by the very inclusion of the dances in his book, infers that they are basse dances, and in his

alphabetical presentation goes so far as to supply the words “*basse dance*” to those titles which in the source begin simply “*de*” (*la reyne de cessile, bourbon*, etc.). A counter argument to Hertz would be that the observations about *saults* and *levees* do not apply any more than the Brussels *mesure* theory at this early stage in the development of the basse dance. *Saults* and *levees* are not the only terms at odds with the later basse dance lore.

What are the *simples recules* in *cessile, bourbon, and calabre*? Are they the same as the *pas menus recules* in *daufine*, and the *pas recules* in *facon*? The *pas menus recules* cannot be the same thing as the *reprises* since both occur in *cessile*, and *bourbon*. Or can they? Consider now the doubles that commence *daufine*. Why write them as three, followed by two, rather than as five? Why write the second set as ij dd? This is the first instance of repetition of a letter to indicate repetition of the step. But is it just a slip of the pen that has combined both methods of indicating the repetition? Or does ijdd mean something different from either ij, or dd? Vallet describes the symbols here as “2 doubles doubles”, and perhaps they should be read as two actions, each of which consists of two doubles. Why is the last dance, *falet*, inset? Was it because the character named was vastly inferior to the others, as Vallet suggests?

Note the form of the references to right and left, viz:

<i>bourgogne</i>	ijj s	a coste droit
<i>cessile</i>	ijj s	a destre
<i>bourbon</i>	ijj s	a destre
<i>calabre</i>	j sault	du pie droite
<i>facon</i>	ijj s	a destre
<i>cessile</i>	j d a senestre	
<i>facon</i>	j d a senestre	

These terms all occur in the middle of dances. No information is given as to which foot should be used to commence a dance. Except for the *sault du pie droite* in *calabre*, all seem to suggest a direction to right and left, rather than the footing, i.e. with right foot, left foot. Nevertheless, three simples to the right can be much more readily accomplished if they are all on the right foot. So this could have some bearing on the contended question whether partners in a dance should employ the same or opposite footing. It would seem that here they should both, or all, be on the right foot to take a step or steps to the right, and the left foot for steps to the left.

The above represents the yield of an intensive scrutiny of a small amount of material, which is often all we have in Early Dance. How much of it is significant is questionable. This gives an opportunity to sound a little warning bell, about being too ready to assume that an author or scribe has written what he has deliberately, indicating precisely what was intended. There is always a possibility of errors of understanding and slips of the pen. There is also the fact that the compulsion to make a note of something arises more often from its strangeness, newness, or incomprehensibility, than from a desire to put into a clear and understandable form something that one knows all about.

Cervera (late 15th century)

One of the most intriguing of the basse dance sources is the material at Cervera (Archivio Historico, Cervera), another instance of flyleaf jottings. In this case the MS containing the jottings is a notarial manual of 1468. The date of the basse dance material is a matter of conjecture, but the date 1496 appears on the verso of one of the relevant folios. This later date is associated with the draft of a legal document, not with the basse dance matter, but may be taken as a clue to the possible date of the latter.

For the convenience of identification, Crane assigned folio numbers 1 and 2 and recto and verso designations to each folio which I shall follow.¹³ Folio 1r contains four dances, only one of which is written in words. The others are written in symbols, with abbreviations above individual or groups of symbols, viz:

R	for reverence, or initial reprise
=	for two simples (the abbreviation above looks more like p than s; “ <i>pas</i> ”, perhaps?)

≡	for double (the abbreviation, above a group of doubles, looks like <i>se</i> ; however, it could be a d.)
3	for reprise or <i>démarche</i> (the abbreviation above looks like r.)
	for <i>conge/branle</i> (abbreviation is the contraction 9=“ <i>con</i> ”).

On folio 2r there are seven dances, in symbols only, except for the two words *voltat* (turned, or turning) and *atras* (back), which occur. There are no accompanying abbreviations this time; and there is an additional symbol † for *démarche/reprise* where it first occurs in the position of a reverence. The sign for the doubles is slightly different, being ≡ instead of ≡. The versos of these folios contain at 1v the legal draft referred to above and at 2v the titles only of some basse dances, most of which are on the rectos. These symbols may be consulted in Vol. I (p. vii of the introduction) and Vol. II (p. 303) of the three volume work *Folklore & Costumbres de Espana* (ed. Francisco Carrera & Candi, Barcelona, 1931–34). There is a copy in the RVW library at Cecil Sharp House.

It is interesting to reflect upon the choice of symbols, and consider what contribution this may make to our understanding of how basse dance steps should be performed. (It would be useful at this stage to re-read the section under the heading **The Steps**¹⁶ printed in the previous edition.) In the interpretations of simples and double that require a close, the four actions (step, close, step, close for the simples; step, step, close for the double) have to be fitted to the six or twelve beats of the music, as understood from surviving musical arrangements. With the simples this presents little problem. By concentrating on the two steps, and not thinking about the timing of the intervening closes, one arrives at “Two into six will go”! For the fitting of the four actions of the double into the six or twelve beats, the Cervera symbols suggest that the solution lies in making the 2nd and 4th of them shorter in duration (the middle step and the close), or the 1st and 3rd of them shorter (the first and third steps). The latter solution works best if the close is taken to belong to the beginning rather than the end of the sequence, which is what Arena describes and Arbeau frowns upon. Either way, the Cervera symbols are arguably in favour of a close. And it is consistent with this that the symbol for the double in a later manuscript in the Biblioteca Central at Barcelona,¹⁷ for which Crane gives the date as c.1580,¹⁸ is three parallel lines of equal length, reflecting Arbeau’s later authority for matching one action to one bar of music; three steps and a close, all of equal length, to four bars. (I quote from Crane’s description of this manuscript. I have not been able to obtain sight of the *Diccionario de la Dansa* of F. Pujol and J. Amades, Barcelona, 1936, to which he refers readers for a full description and facsimile.)

The information printed in the previous edition of this journal on the *branle* was slight. The Cervera symbol for *branle* is ||. But it is not my present brief to go deeply into possible meanings of what has been written; only to draw attention to what has, and to what has not, been written.

For this reason I pass over Salisbury, which is simply a string of some twenty-six step sequences, in abbreviations, each under a title. These are written on the flyleaf of a *Catholicon* printed in Venice in 1497, and now in the library of Salisbury Cathedral. Crane gives a description of the source, and includes the dances in his alphabetical list, giving steps, concordances etc. Hertz, in *The Basse Dance . . .*, publishes a photo of the verso containing the last 19 dances, and discusses the choreographies from the point of view of the content of the dances, and its bearing on his theory of change in structure in the basse dance during the century after 1450. This is another aspect of the subject which is being passed over, particularly in view of D. R. Wilson’s contributions to the previous two issues of this journal, on the subject.

The Brussels MS and the Toulouze Incunabulum

Further information will be found on these basse dance sources in previous editions of *Historical Dance* (vide Wilson 1983 and 1984/5 and Dixon 1984/5). Our present concern is with the many arguments for dating the original or prototype and the Brussels

manuscript and Toulouse print which have been provided by Crane and Hartz.

Neither book is dated. Crane, in his *Materials . . .*, establishes the extremes of 1445 and 1496 for them, preferring a date around 1470 for both the original and the Brussels manuscript, while placing the Toulouse incunabulum in the early 1490's.¹⁹ He publishes a comparative edition of the texts of the two, on pp 36–38, noting every deviation of one from the other. Crane's arguments for the dating of the prototype, circa 1470, are based on musical concordances and the dates of literary references. He places little reliance on the use of geographical and personal-name connections in the dance titles.

For dating **Brussels** Crane mentions that the musical notation provides a further clue, but cites as a crucial factor the workmanship of the manuscript. There are five other known MSS of similar workmanship, silver and gold lettering on black dyed parchment. Crane says "All whose origins have been determined with certainty, with the exception of No 1" (which in the event leaves us with three out of the five) "were executed in Bruges/Brugge within a short period. (*Brussels*) surely belongs to the Flemish series, and by analogy would date from about 1465–1485."²⁰ His reason for placing the date of the prototype and the date of the copy close together are that "such a splendid execution would not likely have been given to a highly practical manuscript, except at a time when it was to be used."²¹

For the dating of **Toulouse** Crane accepts Victor Scholderer's arguments in the introduction to *L'Art et Instruction . . .*²² The terminal date is established here as 1496, since Toulouse moved in December of that year (the evidence comes from a notarial record) from the address given in the colophon at the end of the book, "saint hylaire . . . a lenseigne de la corne du cerf (St. Hilaire . . . at the sign of the Hart's Horn). The earliest likely date is about 1490, about which time the woodcut at the back had been used (probably for the first time if, as was probable, it was specially made for it) in a romance *Paris and Venus*, printed by Denis Meslier. The above is all Scholderer's reasoning, generally accepted. Additionally, there is a numeral, 1488, written on a flyleaf of the book, in a hand which Scholderer was advised was of a later date. He suggests that this might nonetheless have been derived from a genuinely contemporary entry on one of the flyleaves now missing (together with the original binding), a suggestion which Crane dismisses out of hand.²³ Crane mentions that Hartz gives a much later date, between 1485 and 1502, for the copying of it but makes no comment upon this.²⁴

Hartz's case is based partly on musical evidence, specifically the inclusion of three dances which employ smaller note values than the black breves otherwise used throughout. Partly it is based on evidence from just those geographical and historical connections in the dance titles which Crane has dismissed as an aid. To be fair, Crane's dismissal was in consideration of the total of 63 titles, 43 of them common, 15 in **Brussels** but not in **Toulouse**, and 5 in **Toulouse** but not in **Brussels**. The whole range is described by Crane as "rich in historical connections for the whole of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, thus not of much help in dating."²⁵

Hartz makes a case on the basis of the titles of those same three dances that have smaller note values, *La danse de Ravestain*, *La danse de cleves*, and *La franchoise nouvelle*. His argument brings a touch of human colour to the parchment.²⁶

The following associations for the three titles under discussion had already been pointed out by Closson:²⁷

(See Genealogical Table 3 in the Appendix)

Dance de Ravestain Adolphe I of Ravenstein, son of Marie of Burgundy, (the sister of Philip the Good, not the daughter of Charles the Bold), died in 1493. His son Philip of Cleves, by his first wife, was brought up at the Burgundian court by his second wife, Anne of Burgundy, a natural daughter of Philip the Good.

The dance title could have referred to Adolphe before 1493, or to Philip after 1493. Closson favoured Philip.

Dance de Cleves The same Philip of Cleves, before he became Lord of Ravenstein in 1493.

La Franchoise nouvelle Philip's wife, Franchoise. Closson mentions her but it is Hartz who makes the connection.

Hartz points out, "Of the two, Philip and Franchoise, it was not the military captain who would have had a hand in the basse dance MS, but rather his enlightened wife, who maintained a library, and is known to have exchanged manuscripts with Margaret of Austria"²⁸ (who would have been the great grand-daughter of the brother of her husband's grandfather. See Table 5.) A footnote refers to Margaret being known, from an undated letter, to have reclaimed a manuscript from Franchoise on one occasion at least.

Hartz then suggests that Closson has misread a partly obliterated word in an annotation now on the page attached to the back of the front cover. (The pages are no longer in their original order.) Closson reads *Saigne*²⁹ where in Hartz' opinion the word is *Spaigne*, the total entry reading "*Se livre est a laprincesse de Spaigne et la robe amadame de ravestein*." The robe would have referred to the cover of the book, described in an inventory of Margaret of Austria's books as "*de satin cramoisy*", almost certainly detachable, probably jewelled, and likely to have been more valuable than the book itself. The *princesse de Spaigne* would have been Margaret of Austria herself, who was an *infanta* of Spain during the lifetime of her first husband, John of Castile, son of Ferdinand and Isabella. Margaret was married to him in 1495, in a double wedding that united also her brother Philip the Handsome, heir to Burgundy and to the Holy Roman Empire, and the little prince's sister, Joanna, known to posterity as *Joanna la loca*, (Joanna the Mad). When John died in 1497 Margaret returned home to the Netherlands, but would have kept her title of princess of Spain until her second marriage in 1501, to Philibert of Savoy. The partial obliteration of the word *Spaigne* would have occurred during the period of Spanish occupation, and unpopularity, in the Netherlands.

It was the other pair at that double wedding who were to succeed to the throne of Spain as well as to the Holy Roman Empire, founding the Hapsburg dynasties with their sons Charles and Ferdinand, and sending their four daughters as queens to France, Denmark, Hungary, and Portugal. Margaret seems to have been a loser in the marriage stakes. She had originally been betrothed to Charles VIII of France, who married instead Anne of Brittany. Margaret was eleven when she was rejected by Charles (in 1492) but remained a hostage in France for two more years. Her second marriage was nearly as shortlived as her first, lasting only three years. But she found her niche eventually. In 1507, shortly after the death of her brother Philip the Handsome, she was appointed Regent of the Netherlands by Maximilian I, and guardian of Philip and Joanna's children. (See Table 5.)

An inventory of Margaret's books, taken in 1523,³⁰ has the entry "*Item, ung aultre (livre) petit, covers de satin cramoisie, qui se nomme Plusieurs basses dances*". This is the second entry in a list headed "*traille de fert commeneant ampres la porte*", and these same words "*du trailly fer le ii*" occur on the manuscript itself, clinching the identification. The book has thus come to be called "the basse dance book of Margaret of Austria", though it is sometimes referred to, rather, as that of Marie of Hungary, who inherited it from Margaret, her aunt, and whose ex libris is in the book itself. And earlier writers tended to assign it to Marie of Burgundy, Margaret's mother, believing that some of the dance titles indicated a link with Marie's time, rather than that of her daughter, or granddaughter.

Crane's argument for dating the copying of the manuscript about 1470, as stated above, rests on the improbability of such workmanship being put into something rapidly becoming out of date. But Hartz, giving Bruchet's *Marguerite d'Autriche, Duchesse de Savoie*³¹ as reference, avers that Margaret of Austria was nostalgic for the great days of Burgundy's past, the time of Philip the Good and Charles the Bold. In suggesting that the book was made for her, he asks "Are the black pages of the MS not, in fact, another manifestation of the nearly perpetual mourning of the unfortunae lady, like the *Regrets* pieces collected in her chansonniers? The Burgundian tradition offers at least one precedent for this in the black-tinted parchment

leaves of a Book of Hours offered by the city of Bruges in 1467 to Charles the Bold, twice a widower.³²

Referring to his own analysis of the structural changes apparent in basse dances in the course of the fifteenth century, Hertz goes on to say, "In comprehending the nostalgic flavour of Margaret's world, one can best understand how the Brussels MS came to be what it is: the best and most faithful source for the "classic" basse dance of the second half of the fifteenth century, and at the same time the best, in fact the sole, source for the transitional musical style of c. 1500, which leads to the basse dance commune."³³

Conclusion

The questions the basse dance sources pose to musicologists have long been ventilated, and are represented to the waiting dancers as satisfactorily solved; except, perhaps, for the one question over all the others which the dancers are beginning to ask with increasingly loud voice. Are the surviving arrangements really dance music, or are they not rather concert music derived from dance music?

The structure of the basse dance has been discussed in this journal by D. R. Wilson and elsewhere by musicologists, notably Hertz in the article already cited.

This article has aired some questions about the manner of its performance. But others still remain. What was the purpose of those large collections of basse dance sequences? How many sequences would a person be expected to recognise instantly either from the title or from the tune (hidden in the tenor line) and dance correctly? How did the dancers keep track of what point they and the musicians had reached in the progress of a dance? Could they do this and talk at the same time? (Arena mentions conversing while dancing, with a caution to "bear in mind the numbers of the dance" and also to "listen carefully to the cadences".³⁴ By his time there was beginning to be some correspondence between the phrases of the dance and the cadences of the music.)

The questions are legion. Shall we learn the answers? My guess is that the basse dance will for ever retain a layer of mystery.

References

- Balteau, J. ed. 1936 Paris *Dictionnaire de Biographie Francaise*.
Brainard, Ingrid 1970 Seminar *Bassedanse, Bassa danza and Ballo in the Fifteenth Century*.
Bruchet, Max 1927 Lille *Marguerite d'Autriche, Duchesse de Savoie* (cited by Hertz).
Brussels, see Closson.
Capelli, Adriano, 1979 Milan *Dizionario di Abbreviature*, 6th ed.
Carreras y Candi, F. ed. 1931-34 Barcelona *Folklore y costumbres de Espana* (3 vols).
Chastellain, Georges *Oeuvres*, ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove (8 vols) 1863-66 Brussels.
Closson, E. 1912 Brussels *Le Manuscrit dit des basses danses de la Bibliotheque de Bourgogne*.
Crane, F. 1968 Assen *Materials for the Study of the Fifteenth Century Basse Danse* (Musicological Studies, 16).
Dixon, Peggy 1984/5 'Reflections on Basse Dance Source Material - A Dancer's Review', *Historical Dance* 2 No. 4, 24-27.
de Fresne, G. see Mathieu d'Escouchy.
Hertz, D. 1964 'The basse dance: its evolution circa 1450 to 1550', *Annales musicologiques* 6 (1958-63), 287-340.
Kendall, P. M. 1974 London *Louis XI*. Cardinal paperback edition.
Kervyn de Lettenhove see Chastellain.

- Mathieu d'Escouchy 1863 Paris *Chronique*, ed. G. du Fresne de Beaucourt, Vol. I.
Michelant 1871 Brussels *Inventaire des vaisselles, etc . . . de Marguerite d'Autriche* Acad. Roy. de Sc. & des Lettres (cited by Closson and by Hertz).
Sachs C. 1963 New York *World History of the Dance* (translated from the German of 1932 by Bessie Schonberg).
Scholderer, V. ed. 1971 Wakefield *L'Art et Instruction de Bien Dancer (Michel Toulouze, Paris)* A facsimile edition with translation by A. E. Lequet.
Toulouze, Michel see Scholderer.
Vallet de Viriville, Auguste ed. 1859 Paris *Chronique de la Pucelle*.
Wilson, D. R. 1983 'Theory and Practice in 15th-century French basse danse', *Historical Dance* 2 No. 3, 1-2.
Wilson, D. R. 1984/5 'The Development of French Basse Danse', *Historical Dance* 2 No. 4, 5-12.
Wood, M. unpublished papers at RVW Library, Cecil Sharp House. (Trans. of Arena's *Ad suos compagnones* first pub. c.1529).

Footnote references

1. Vallet, p. 100 et seq.
2. Crane, p. 22.
3. Kendall, p. 66.
4. Balteau.
5. Vallet, p. 100.
6. Crane, p. 22.
7. Mathieu, pp. 40-41.
8. Chastellain, Vol. 8, p. 68.
9. de Fresne, fn p. 41.
10. Kervyn, Vol. 8 p. 64.
11. Brainard, (1970).
12. Capelli, p. xli.
13. Hertz, p. 292.
14. Dixon, p. 24.
15. Crane, p. 13.
16. Dixon, pp. 25-27.
17. Crane, pp. 27-29.
18. Crane, p. 28.
19. Crane, p. 7.
20. Crane, p. 6.
21. Crane, p. 4.
22. Scholderer, pp. 4-6.
23. Crane, p. 26.
24. Crane, p. 7.
25. Crane, p. 6.
26. Hertz, pp. 317-319.
27. Closson, p. 45.
28. Hertz, p. 317.
29. Closson, p. 1.
30. Michelant (cited Closson, p. 3, Hertz, p. 318).
31. Bruchet (cited Hertz, p. 317).
32. Hertz, p. 319.
33. Hertz, p. 322.
34. Wood, p. 12.

Appendix

The Genealogical Tables have been built up from a variety of sources, but most notably from:

- Cartellieri, O. 1929 London *The Court of Burgundy* (translated by Malcolm Letts); de Jong, Jane *Mary of Hungary*; Levron, Jacques 1972 Paris *Le Bon Roi Rene*; Prawdın, Michael 1938 London *The Mad Queen Joan*; Vaughan, Richard 1975 London *Valois Burgundy and Nouveau Larousse Elementaire* 1967 Paris.

Appendix

GENEALOGICAL TABLES

