

COURTIERS AND "COURT DANCE": TO LEAP OR NOT TO LEAP

Cortesanos y "danza de corte": saltar o no saltar

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RESUMEN:

El artículo examina la contraposición entre la visión del cortesano del siglo XV con respecto a la técnica y a su repertorio de danza y la de los principales maestros y autores de tratados de danza de la época. ¿Saltar o no saltar? En el siglo XV, saltar era una prerrogativa de las clases bajas, y sobre todo de la gente del campo de ambos sexos. También el salto se asocia a los *ballerini* "profesionales", incluyendo a las doncellas jóvenes que ocasionalmente se exhibían en la corte acompañadas de los maestros de danza, y que se admiraban por sus torsiones y vueltas, su agilidad, gracia y virtuosismo. Con la excepción del modesto salto en el paso del *saltarello*, saltar estaba considerado inapropiado para una mujer o para las *donne di palazzo*, las cortesanas o las nobles *literate*.

Las descripciones coreográficas y las instrucciones, junto con el requerimiento de Guglielmo Ebreo sobre la ejecución del salto, de las vueltas y de las variaciones, y algunas danzas *fiorite*, estaban casi siempre dirigidas a los hombres. De hecho, los hombres de la clase alta saltaban: no sólo el burgués en la escuela de danza y el *scudiero* (o caballero) en la *moresca*, sino, dependiendo de la edad, de la inclinación, de la posición social, del talento y de la ocasión, el cortesano, el gentilhomme y el príncipe podía saltar.

Palabras clave:

Danza, educación, salto.

ABSTRACT:

The article examines why fifteenth-century courtiers' views regarding the contemporary dancing technique and repertoire contrasted so markedly with those of the leading dancing-masters and authors of dance treatises--Guglielmo Ebreo and Domenico da Piacenza, and with actual practice. To leap or not to leap? In the fifteenth-century, leaping was a prerogative of the lower classes; and first of all, country folk, often of both sexes. It was also associated with "professional" *ballerini*, including young girls who occasionally performed at court, accompanied by a dancing-master, and who were admired for their extraordinary twistings and turnings, their agility, grace and virtuosity. With the exception of the modest hop in the *saltarello* step, leaping was considered quite inappropriate for ladies, whether *donne di palazzo*, courtesans, or noble *literate*.

The written choreographies and instructions, including Guglielmo Ebreo's injunction to perform jumps, full-turns and flourishes, and certain *fiorito* dances, were almost entirely directed to men. And indeed, better class men did leap: not only the burgher in the dancing-school and the *scudiero* (or knight) in the *moresca*, but, depending on age, inclination, social standing, talent, and the occasion, so did the courtier, the gentleman, and the prince.

Key Words:

Dance, education, leap, *salto*.

«Remember that whoever dances in a short garment is required to perform jumps and full-turns and flourishes» (SPARTI 1993, pp. 232-233)¹. Thus declares Giovanni Ambrosio (alias Guglielmo Ebreo) in one of the later versions of his 1463 *De pratica seu arte tripudii*. Guglielmo's master in the art of dance, Domenico da Piacenza, included the *salto* (the jump, hop, leap) among the *passi* or *moti naturali*, the basic rather than the ornamental steps. In contrast to these instructions we have the concerned admonishment of another of Domenico's disciples, Antonio Cornazano. In his description of how to perform the *saltarello*, the hit dance of the fifteenth century, Cornazano warns that «not only the lady's foot must never leave the ground, but not even that of the man, except in very rare occasions, and only if he is a good dancer» (CORNAZANO 1455/1465, fol. 6v)².

Like Guglielmo and Domenico, Cornazano was the author of a dance treatise, but he differed from them by being neither a composer of *balli* nor a dancing-master. He was, instead, a poet, a humanist, and a “professional” courtier. In this presentation I will examine why Cornazano's and other courtiers' views regarding the contemporary dancing technique and repertoire contrasted so markedly with those, not only of Guglielmo and Domenico, but with actual practice.

Fifteenth-century dance treatises and their destinations

Dance manuals appeared in Italy starting in the 1450s. They contained composed choreographies –*bassedanze* and *balli*– and their music, almost entirely the creations of Domenico da Piacenza and Guglielmo Ebreo. Furthermore, the treatises set out the very first formulations of an aesthetic theory of the dance, taking many of the concepts found in other arts and sciences –such as memory, measure, manner and air– and making them intrinsic to dance.

¹ «Sappiate chi dança con uno vestito corto li se arichiede de fare salti & volte tonde & fioregiare».

² English translations, here and elsewhere, my own: «nè la donna deve mai dispiccare el suo tempo da terra, nè anchora l'homo, senno rarissimo, se gli è bon dançatore».

The treatises were written, as was *De pictura*, a treatise on painting written in 1436 by the architect and humanist Leon Battista Alberti, to draw attention to and gain recognition for the “craft” in question, hoping to raise its level to that of art and science. By stressing the nobility and classical origins of the dance and, in a typically humanistic apology, invoking philosophers of antiquity, pagan deities, and the Gods and heroes of the Old Testament, the treatises showed dance to be an appropriate pursuit for a prince. This was of primary importance to Guglielmo who spent much of his life looking for patrons, using his treatise to better his chances for employment, and aiming high. He dedicated the first copy of his *De pratica seu arte tripudii* to Galeazzo Maria Sforza, the heir to the Duchy of Milan, and was able to get the poet Giovanni Mario Filelfo to write a flattering Ode in his honor. The volume was simply but beautifully illuminated and written out by a well-known scribe, Pagano da Rho. Guglielmo sent copies of *De pratica* to Alessandro Sforza, lord of Pesaro, to Federico of Montefeltro, duke of Urbino, and to Lorenzo de' Medici.

While the theoretical parts of the dance treatises were undoubtedly intended to impress humanistic readers, they were couched in terms that would also appeal to princes. The practical parts were directed to would-be dancers, those at courts and those learning the profession of *ballarini* (that is, dancers and/or dance-masters). Guglielmo affirms that he has written his book because of the entreaties of his students, and Domenico da Piacenza's treatise was recorded by an anonymous disciple. At the same time, Domenico named some of his early dances after people and places connected with the Este court in Ferrara, where he enjoyed a stable and privileged position.

The nobility undoubtedly did dance Domenico's and Guglielmo's choreographies, but so did the urban bourgeoisie. As late as 1517, at least four of Domenico's *balli* were still being danced in the city of Bologna in a setting where a visiting German pedagogue and music theorist observed them and sent off descriptions to the daughters of a leading citizen of Nuremberg. Yet more than sixty years earlier, Cornazano had been dismayed that Domenico's dances had failed to be exclusive. In 1455 he had dedicated his *Libro dell'arte del danzare*

to the Duke of Milan's daughter Ippolita Sforza, including eleven of his master's choreographies and specifically excluding –as an example of many more– nineteen others. Those described were «created for noble chambers, and to be danced only by worthy ladies and not plebeians» (CORNAZANO 1455/1465, fol. 13v)³. The *infinite* dances («altri infiniti balli et bassedance») over which Cornazano «in silence passed» («con silentio gli passò») were, he believed, «too old, or too well known and common» (CORNAZANO 1455/1465, fol. 29v)⁴. Among the dances blacklisted by Cornazano for being antiquated in 1455 was the *ballo el gioioso*, performed in Bologna in 1517, and lauded as a work of art by the humanist Giangiorgio Trissino in the 1530s, on a par with «the works of Jannequin for music, Leonardo for painting, and Homer, Dante and Petrarch for poetry» (TRISSINO 1549/1970, p. 12).

Cornazano would probably have been horrified to learn that in the 1480s, in Montefiascone, a small, independent city-state north of Rome with no ruling family, a mere notary had composed *fiorito* or embellished versions of three popular *balli*, two by Domenico, including the same *el gioioso*. Not only were the dances here not performed by the aristocracy, but basic steps, often replaced with rhythmically complex *contrapassi*, were now ending with, to Cornazano's eyes, non-decorous *salti* as well as with rapid turns (*volte*) «inwards, backwards, straight or reverse» (SPARTI 1995b, pp. 249-251).

Cornazano, furthermore, would have liked his noble patrons to avoid the *piva*, a dance that was –like the *saltarello*– extremely in vogue in urban and country festivities, where couples, improvising for hours, performed it using simple and very fast steps. An example of the rustic and rapid *piva* is given by Cornazano himself in one of his risqué *Proverbs in Jest* known as *facetie*, a very fashionable genre among courtier-poets, including Castiglione, author of *Il Cortigiano*. The setting of Cornazano's “Jest” is a private carnival party in the province of Piacenza. Far from princes and courts, a squire and a village lass, pressed together with a great crowd of people, are free to fondle each other while whirling around to the ever-accelerating *piva*. Writing in his dance

³ «Fabricati per sale signorile, e da esser solamente dançati per dignissime Madonne, et non plebeie».

⁴ «O troppo vecchi o troppo divulgate».

treatise, however, Cornazano maintains that this «village dance» («ballo da villa») «is nowadays scorned and despised by noble persons and good dancers» (CORNAZANO 1455/1465, fols. 13^v, 6^r)⁵. Immediately after, however, he tells the lady that if she should happen to dance the *piva*, she should keep to the basic steps, but «helping the man in the turns, capers and leaps that he will have to do, straight and reverse, in and out»⁶. Cornazano, who boasted that no living dancer other than himself could see a new dance only once and then perform it perfectly, was clearly caught between his pride in being an outstanding dancer and his aspirations, as a courtier, for self-advancement. In his dance treatise he was determined to distance himself from the common multitude.

Humanism and the Rise of the Professional Courtier

Many humanists who were neither rich nor of noble birth felt as Cornazano did and showed their contempt for “the vulgar herd”, and, like Alberti himself, for «the lazy and cowardly plebeians» (ALBERTI 1969, p. 268)⁷. These humanists equated virtue with nobility; moral worth with social rank. In the first half of the fifteenth century, many humanists had reflected the aims and values of the independent city-republics and emphasized civic consciousness. They strove to achieve a perfect harmony between the contemplative and the active life and defended wealth as a resource of civilization, for the beautifying of a city, and the enhancing of the quality of life. As, however, the «ever growing power of princes» increased (GARIN 1952, p. 103), the humanists' vigorous interest in political life and action was gradually re-channeled and finally restricted to literary, philological, and aesthetic concerns. This “flight from the world” by way of a distinct turn to contemplation and metaphysics (such as we see in the works of the Neo-Platonists Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, and Poliziano), was encouraged by Lorenzo de' Medici and other princes who were finding the emphasis on social usefulness and the tasks and responsibilities of public life an inhibition and a threat. This was eloquently

⁵«Hoggi di [...] abiecta e vilipesa da persone magnifiche e da bon dançatori».

⁶«Aiutare l'huomo nelle volte sicondi gli scambiitti e salti che'l vegnerà a fare, dritti e riversi, e dentro e fuori».

⁷ «L'insipienza della moltitudine e la plebe ignava».

summarized in 1952 by the historian/philosopher Eugenio Garin in his *L'umanesimo italiano: filosofia e vita civile nel rinascimento*:

If early humanism was a glorification of civic life and of the construction of an earthly city of man, the last part of the fifteenth century was characterized by an orientation towards contemplation and an escape from the world. [...] The predominance of princes came to be more and more pronounced. Today we are inclined to recognise their merits; but during the Renaissance they appeared, even though some of them were tyrants of genius, as oppressors of liberty (GARIN 1965, p. 78).

According to social and cultural historian Peter Burke, «as for the political role of the nobility, it was being undermined by the use of what historians call “absolute monarchy”» (BURKE 1995, p. 35). Hence, it was necessary «to redefine the identity of the Italian noble at a time when their traditional roles were under threat».

This second phase of humanism, which was profoundly apolitical and no longer an operative force in the life of the city, tended to make the new humanist a mere «elegant ornament of court» (GARIN 1952, pp. 103-104). The prince, meanwhile, had learned to distribute favors in exchange for loyalty and adulation. Thus developed the Renaissance courtier, at worst a parvenu and parasite, at best, a “professional rhetorician” sustaining the prince's self-image through flattery, eloquent as it might be (MARTINES 1992, p. 206). In the early 1430s, Leon Battista Alberti wrote, «a great lord loves and esteems you just exactly as long as you are useful to him» (ALBERTI 1969, p. 237)⁸. Alberti further claimed that «corrupt and malicious braggarts have become ever more common in noble houses and [...] most of them are there in idleness, wasting time»⁹.

More than a century later, in 1586, Tomaso Garzoni, in his well-known *Piazza Universale di tutte le professioni del mondo*, wrote that the *cortigiano*,

In order to gain credit in the court, and win over the prince [the cortigiano has become a] corrupting contriver of deceptions, calumnies, and devices [...] affected in his way of walking [...] vain [...] today many courts are nothing more than colleges of depraved

⁸ «Tanto ama il signore, tanto ti pregia, quanto tu gli se' utile».

⁹ «Sempre più sono e' viziosi, ostentatori, assentatori e maligni in casa de' signori ch'e' buoni: E [...] quasi la maggiore parte di quelli stanno ivi perdendo tempo oziosi».

men where there is a shipwreck of all virtues [and] where the just are persecuted and the learned, the literati, the scholars are held low (BRONZINI 1996, pp. 644-45)¹⁰.

Even Ottaviano Fregoso, one of the participants in Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*, which appeared in 1528 but reflected the life at court thirty years earlier, comments that «nowadays rulers are so corrupted by evil living, by ignorance and by false conceit [...] generated by men who] seek to win their favour through lies and flattery» (BULL/CASTIGLIONE 1967, p. 288)¹¹. In *Il Cortegiano*, Castiglione set out to redeem and recreate the courtier, inventing a profession where, hitherto, none had existed. He himself, «snobbish and ambitious» with his «self-interested endeavour [...] to justify the profession» (BULL/CASTIGLIONE 1967, pp. 9, 14), was the prototype.

The Courtier on Dance

Clearly, the social and economic aspirations of Castiglione, Cornazano, and other courtiers and humanists, must be kept in mind when reading and evaluating their idealized writings on various subjects, including the dance. For them, decorum was all important, for it elevated the courtier, giving him a patina of gentility and distinguishing him from the general public. Hence it did not matter so much what particular dances you danced, as long as they differed from those performed by the bourgeoisie or peasant, but it did matter how (and where) you danced them. Castiglione is concerned with *dissimulazione* (dissembling or feigning). His way of dealing with dancing, from the point of view of a courtier, is absolutely “politically correct”. He is both prudent and patronizing, as can be observed in the words of Federico Fregoso:

¹⁰ «Per acquistar credito nella corte, e impadronirsi del prencipe [è diventato un] sofisticato machinatore d'inganni, di calornie, e di trovate [...] affettato nel passo [...] vano [...] oggidì molte corti non sono altro, che un collegio d'huomini depravati [...] dove è un naufragio di tutte le virtù [...] dove i giusti sono perseguitati e [dove si] tengono basso un dotto, un letterato, un disciplinato».

¹¹ «Oggidì i principi son tanto corrotti dalle male consuetudini e dalla ignoranza e falsa persuasione di se stessi, e che tanto è difficile il dar loro notizia della verità ed indurgli alla virtù, e che gli omini con le bugie ed adulazioni e con così viciosi modi cercano d'entrar loro in grazia».

There are various other kinds of recreation, such as dancing, that can be enjoyed in public and in private. And I consider that the courtier should take great care over this; for when he is dancing in front of a crowd and along with many others it is *fitting* [...] that he should maintain a certain dignity, though tempered by the lightness and delicate grace of his movements [...]. He should not attempt those quick movements of the feet and double kicks and beats which we approve of in our [musician] Barletta but which, to be sure, are unsuitable for a gentleman. On the other hand, when he is performing in a private room [...] or at a masked ball, then I think he should be allowed to try them (BULL/CASTIGLIONE 1967, p. 118)¹².

Elsewhere, Castiglione ridicules the dancing-master Pierpaolo who, like his father Guglielmo Ebreo, served the ducal court of Urbino:

So you see that to *reveal intense application and skill* [rather than «dissembling one's knowledge»] robs everything of grace. Who is there among you who doesn't laugh when our Pierpaolo dances in that way of his, with those little jumps and with his legs stretched on tiptoe, keeping his head motionless, as if he were made of wood, and all so laboured that he seems to be counting every step? Who is so blind that he doesn't see in this the clumsiness of affectation? (BULL/CASTIGLIONE 1967, p. 67-68)¹³.

It seems apparent that skills like music and dance were to be performed with deceptive ease. Indeed, leading Renaissance historian Sydney Anglo, notes that the stress placed upon appearances and reputation is the *Cortegiano's* most striking feature (ANGLO 1984 p. 41).

It is possible, of course, that Pierpaolo had not inherited his father's talents or was dancing in an outmoded style, that of Guglielmo. But what we are really being told is that his dancing did not have (and probably, due to his low

¹² «Sono alcuni altri esercizi, che far si possono nel publico e nel privato, come è il danzare, ed a questo estimo io che debba aver rispetto il cortegiano; perché danzando in presenza di molti ed in loco pieno di populo parmi che si gli convenga servare una certa dignità, temperata però con leggiadra ed aersa dolcezza di movimenti [...] e non entri in quelle prestezze de' piedi e duplicati rebattimenti, i quali veggiamo che nel nostro Barletta stanno benissimo e forse in un gentilom sariano poco convenienti; benché in camera privatamente [...] penso che licito gli sia [...] ma in publico non così, fuor che travestito».

¹³ My emphasis. «Vedete adunque come il mostrar l'arte ed un così intento studio levi la grazia d'ogni cosa. Qual di voi è che non rida quando il nostro messer Pierpaulo danza alla foggia sua, con que' saltetti e gambe stirate in punta di piede, senza mover la testa, come se tutto fosse un legno, con tanta attenzione, che di certo pare che vada numerando i passi? Qual occhio è così cieco, che non vegga in questo la disgrazia della affettazione?».

birth, could never have) «that grace we see in [the movements of] many of the men and women who are with us now» (BULL/CASTIGLIONE 1967, p. 68) characterized by that *sprezzata desinvoltura* (that nonchalant spontaneity). With the term *sprezzatura*, together with those of *cortesìa* and “dissimulation”, Castiglione tried to re-shape and rehabilitate a courtier elite. The interesting point is that these concepts are completely absent from the dance treatises where, in the fifteenth century, the basic humanistic tenets of *measure*, *manner*, and *air* ruled, while symmetry and proportion dominated those of the late sixteenth century. The courtier's aim was thus very different from that of Domenico and Guglielmo who, even if composing dances for noble patrons (or would-be patrons), were nonetheless creating real choreographies, to be performed according to a specific aesthetic: one which also included technical skill and virtuosity.

One of the most disappointing, and revealing, remarks about dance on the part of a courtier appears in the third book of *Il Cortegiano*. It is Castiglione's assertion, in the mouth of his cousin Cesare Gonzaga, that all comely exercises arise from a desire to please the ladies: «Who is there who studies how to dance gracefully for any other reason but to give pleasure to the ladies?» (BULL/CASTIGLIONE 1967, p. 256)¹⁴.

Courtier and Courtesan

It is worth pointing out that the name *cortigiano* and its female counterpart, *cortigiana* (or *courtesan* in English), strayed from their original meanings of “man” and “lady of the court” to indicate someone disreputable. At the end of the fifteenth century, both the *cortigiano* and the *cortigiana* (courtier and courtesan) offered sophistication and intellectual refinement in return for patronage. Both, however, had to stoop to meretricious servility to win economic support. Both shared ambitions for political and social advancement, and bred contempt among the envious. While rescuing the *cortigiano*, Castiglione abandoned the *cortigiana*, changing her name to that of «donna di

¹⁴ «Chi studia di danzare e ballar leggiadramente per altro, che per compiacere a donne?».

palazzo» in the second edition of his *Book of the Courtier*. Unfortunately, neither political necessity nor personal opportunism demanded a book to justify the role of the lady of the court (that is, the *lady-in-waiting*, not the noble lady), and the role remained –as described by Castiglione– confined, idealized and relatively insipid.

One of the personages of *The Book of the Courtier*, is Vincenzo Colli, also known as Calmeta. Like Castiglione, he was an author, poet, ambassador and courtier. In Calmeta's essay, *Della Ostentazione*, he hauls over the coals some of his fellow poet-courtiers who, he claims, suffer from arrogance and self-glorification. He doesn't spare the ladies: neither those who “pretend” to be literati, nor those, who in their dress and behavior, have no sense of measure. He writes about a young Milanese noblewoman, Bianca Lucia Stanga, who despite, or because, of her many accomplishments, has begun to think of herself as «the most universal woman of the world», and so «has taken to fencing, dancing the *gagliarda*, wearing both a dagger and a cloak like a gallant, and various other doings which the female sex should not only shun but abominate» (CALMETA 1959, p. 40)¹⁵.

Calmeta finds it abhorrent that Bianca Lucia Stanga should dance the *gagliarda*, which was to become the most popular dance in Italy (and Europe) during the entire 16th and the greater part of the 17th centuries. Gentlewomen, according to the dance treatises of 1581 through 1614, *did* perform the *gagliarda*, though they were not expected to do the most showy and intricate, vigorous and virtuosic variations, which included leg thrusts, high jumps, turns in the air, and caprioles. On the other hand, when Calmeta was writing *Della Ostentazione* during the last three years of the 15th century, the *gagliarda* had not yet “officially” entered the world of the courts, and this undoubtedly is one explanation for his scandalized reaction, inasmuch as it was being danced most frequently in the countryside, where it had originated, and in urban bourgeois dancing-schools (SPARTI 1995a, pp. 6-8; 2009, p. 213).

¹⁵ «Si è data a schermire, ballar la *gagliarda*, portar pugnale a canto, un mantello alla brava, e molte altre operazioni che dal sesso muliebri si doveriano no solo fuggire ma abominare».

“Court” dance

Does the fact that the village and town *gagliarda* was adopted and refined by the nobility make it a *court dance*? What of the *balli* by Domenico and Guglielmo that were performed by princes as well as by the bourgeoisie in Bologna and in Montefiascone? Historians today –be they dance specialists or art or social historians– continue, for the most part, to refer to early modern choreographies as *court dances*. The term is clearly inappropriate and ignores, first of all, the numerous independent city-republics of fifteenth-century Italy. Also overlooked are the urban dancing schools where the same (and/or similar) dances as those created by Domenico and Guglielmo were taught by Jewish and Christian dance-masters from the 1460s well into the next century. To call these choreographies *court* or *courtly dance* is far too restrictive. I suggest these terms are part of the mystification that grew up around Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* and around the courtier himself who was anxious to establish *courtly fashions* for usage among a new elite. Nor can Domenico's and Guglielmo's dances be defined (or in some cases “dismissed”) as *social*, rather than *theatrical* dances. These classifications are meaningless for the Quattro and Cinquecento and need to be replaced by an understanding of the context and the intention of each dance –the when and where, the why and who. The same *ballo* or *bassadanza* could be performed in private chambers for the delight of a princess and an informal gathering, or during a great public festivity where it served as a vehicle for the thousands of spectators to admire the splendour of dress, jewels and decor. Nor was virtuosity unique to the courts, or to dance in spectacle, as can be seen by the extraordinary turns and jumps in the *fioriti* (flowered) versions of Montefiascone, and in the *gagliarda* variations which filled the pages of sixteenth and seventeenth century printed manuals. When Domenico and Guglielmo, and the dancing-masters who “published” 100 to 150 years later, composed their dances, each dance was for a specific number of dancers, had a precise form and organization, and its own music, steps, technique, and ornaments, all of which had to be learned and faithfully

reproduced. Based, moreover, on a particular aesthetic, each unique choreography was considered by its creator, an “art” dance.

Why, one may ask, are none of the 80-odd *bassedanze* and *balli* described in the fifteenth-century treatises ever mentioned in ambassadorial reports that refer to dancing at various courts? These references are sparse and usually limited to brief remarks such as, «they went into the grand hall and danced for two hours» (SANUDO 1879-1903, p. 227) or, «having returned to court, they performed many dances until nightfall» (ZAMBOTTI 1502, XXIV, 7, p. 320). These cursory mentions of dancing are, moreover, quite outweighed by the long and detailed descriptions of the participants' dress, of wall hangings and other decorations, and of the courses of a banquet. I propose that this discrepancy is due to the fact that the *bassedanze* and *balli* were not *courtly* enough. *Courtly art* signified propaganda for the prince and, first and foremost, the display of power through magnificence. For the diarists and chroniclers whose business it was to report on splendor and lavish expenditure, *court dancing* was the *moresca*, a kind of pantomime ballet that combined the showy, the sublime, and the expensive. The *moresca's* spectacularity, its rich costumes, masks, scenery, and special effects, caught the attention of diarists. The subject matter, exotic, grotesque, martial, they found fascinating. In addition, the *moresca's* frequent mythological and heroic themes were clear political messages. Allegory and symbolism flattered and idealized the prince, highlighting his virtues, magnificence and power. *Moresche* were performed, at the end of the fifteenth and during the first two decades of the sixteenth century, in courts such as those of Milan, Ferrara, Pesaro, Urbino, and papal Rome, as part of festivities for carnival, for state weddings, and for princely entries or visits. They provided entertainment and relief, particularly between the acts of ancient (often tedious and incomprehensible) Latin plays, and revived the so-called «narrative dancing» of classical Antiquity.

It is interesting to note that Castiglione had first-hand experience with the courtly *moresca* as commissioned author and *corago* as well as princely informant. For his play *Tirsi*, performed at the court of Urbino in 1506, he prepared «the most beautiful *moresca* which has ever been invented»

(D'ANCONA 1971, 2, p. 102)¹⁶. On another occasion, in the role of ambassador, he wrote to the Marquis Federico Gonzaga reporting in detail on «a very lovely Sienese *moresca*» which had taken place in Rome in the courtyard of Castel Sant'Angelo (CRUCIANI 1983 pp. 491-492). He also directed, produced, and probably created the four danced *intermezzi* for the 1513 Urbino performance of Bibbiena's *Calandria*, the most well-known being the *moresca* about the heroic deeds of Jason. Here, Castiglione had to, «in all haste contend with painters, carpenters, actors, musicians, and *moreschieri*» (PADOAN 1985, p. 207)¹⁷. A far cry from the *sprezzatura*, *dissimulazione*, and decorous dancing proclaimed in *The Book of the Courtier*.

To leap or not to leap? In the fifteenth-century, leaping was a prerogative of the lower classes; and first of all, country folk, often of both sexes. It was also associated with “professional” *ballarini*, including young girls who occasionally performed at court, accompanied by a dancing-master, and who were admired for their extraordinary twistings and turnings, their agility, grace and virtuosity. With the exception of the modest hop in the *saltarello* step, leaping was considered quite inappropriate for ladies, whether *donne di palazzo*, courtesans, or noble *literate* like Bianca Lucia Stanga. The written choreographies and instructions, including Guglielmo's injunction to perform jumps, full-turns and flourishes, and the Montefiascone notary's *fiorito* dances, were almost entirely directed to men. And indeed, better class men did leap: not only the burgher in the dancing-school and the *scudiero* (or knight) in the *moresca*, but, depending on age, inclination, social standing, talent, and the occasion, so did the courtier, the gentleman, and the prince.

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¹⁶ «La più bella moresca che fin allora fosse mai stata fatta».

¹⁷ «Molto in fretta, e da chi avea da combattere e con pittori e con maestri di legnami e recitatori e musici e moreschieri».

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