
Primary Dance Sources: An Annotated Bibliography

by Geoffrey Matthias

[Editor's Note: This article was written several years ago, and therefore lacks a few articles and books that have since been published.]

Introduction

This article is intended to provide more information about the primary dance sources which are available to us for the reconstruction of early dance. Each entry consists of a bibliographic reference for the source and any modern reprints and/or translations in which it may be available, and a short discussion of the contents of the source and its usefulness to SCA dance historians and dance reconstructors. The bibliography is based on one which was created by Patri du Chat Gris several years ago, and I am indebted to him for allowing me to use it, as well as for the use of his library. I believe that every existing primary source is referenced in this bibliography, although I may have missed reprints of some of them, particularly more recent reprints. In cases where there are two or more similar reprints or facsimilies of the same work, I have included only the one which I believe to be the more readily available. In cases where there is an older edition which includes a translation (or some other valuable feature) but is no longer as available as a more recent facsimile, I have included references for both.

Format

The format of this article follows the outline below.

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II. Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Century Sources

- A. Italian Sources
 - B. French/Burgundian Sources
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Time Periods

Section I covers manuals which date from approximately 1450-1550, while Section II covers those which date from 1550-1650. These dates were chosen to reflect the difference in dance styles which existed during these periods. For instance, while Arbeau discusses Basse Dances, most of the sources for that style of dance fall in the earlier period (and there is evidence that Arbeau's Basse Dance is different from those which were done in the previous century). The separation by country is partly arbitrary, but also partly because of stylistic differences. An example is the difference between the Italian and Burgundian sources which deal with Basse Dances during the first period. The Italian sources give dances which are much more free form, and require many more kinds of steps than do the Burgundian sources, which mainly give simple formulas for dances.

Section I.A -- Fifteenth Century Italian Sources

Domenico da Piacenza

Domenico da Piacenza. De arte saltandi & choreas ducendi (c. 1450). Ms. in Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale (fonds it. 972). Published by Dante Bianchi. "Un trattato inedito di Domenico da Piacenza." La Bibliofilia. Florence. Anno 65 (1963), pp. 109-149.

Italian dance of the fifteenth century is the earliest form of dance for which written instructions have survived to the present. This is the earliest of those manuals, and according to some authorities, the best. Many of the dances described in this manual continue to appear in manuals up until the early sixteenth century, which gives an indication of their popularity.

Italian dances of the time can be broken down into two general categories, bassadanza and balli. The difference between the two is primarily one of tempo and meter; bassadanza are always in 3/2 time, while the meter may change in the middle of balli, from 4/4 to 3/2 to 3/4, etc. There are often several such changes in a ballo, sometimes as many as four or five. Balli also tend to be more involved choreographically, including more complex steps and figures.

This manual consists of 56 relatively small pages. The first thirteen of these contain instruction on how the dances and steps are to be performed, and the remainder of the manuscript consists of choreographies and their music. A total of fifteen choreographies are included.

Antonio Cornazano.

Antonio Cornazano. Libro dell'arte del danzare (1455). Ms. copy (c. 1465) in Rome Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (Codex Capponiano, 203). Published with notes by C. Mazzi. "Il <<libro dell'arte del danzare>> di Antonio Cornazano." La Bibliofilia. Florence. Anno 17 (1916), pp. 1-30. Translated by Madeleine Inglehearn and Peggy Forsyth. The Book on the Art of Dancing (London: Dance Books Ltd, 1981).

This is currently the only one of the fifteenth century Italian treatises which is available in translation, and so is the earliest source easily accessible to most readers. Anyone who is at all serious about fifteenth century dance should obtain a copy, although consultation of the original and other sources in the Italian are a must for any serious reconstruction of the dances. About two fifths of the book contains a discussion of the qualities which one needs for dancing, such as Memory, Measure, Manner, Spirit, Variety and Use of Space. These generalities give way to a discussion of tempo and steps, although the step descriptions given are hazy and open to multiple interpretations (as is usually the case with these manuals). The remaining three fifths of the book are given over to descriptions of dances, balli and bassedanza, some of which appear in the other available sources.

Guglielmo Ebreo

Guglielmo Ebreo. Guglielmi Hebraei pisauriensis de pratica seu arte tripudii vulgare opusculum (1463). Ms. (by the amanuensis Paganus Raudensis) in Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale (fonds it. 973). unpublished.

All of the manuals attributed to Guglielmo Ebreo are roughly similar in structure (note that by manual I mean a work which includes information on how the dances and steps are to be performed, not just choreographies). The discussion in each is broken down into classifications in a similar fashion to Cornazano, including sections on Measure, Memory, Use of Space, etc. The differences are primarily small changes in the exact wording, although some manuals include sections that are not in others, and some sections are more extensive in some manuals. The primary difference between the manuals is how many choreographies each includes, and which they are. Another difference is whether the manual includes music for the dances or not.

This particular manuscript consists of one hundred and three small pages. The first forty three discuss steps and their performance. The remainder of the manual includes choreographies for thirty one dances, fourteen bassadanze and seventeen balli. The last few pages contain the music for the dances.

Guglielmo Ebreo. Untitled (c. 1460). Ms. in Foligno, Seminario Vescovile, Biblioteca L. Jacobilli (MS D.I. 42). Published (as a nuptial offering to the couple Renier-Campostrini) by Michele Faloci-Pulignani. Otto bassdanze di M. Guglielmo de Pesaro e de M. Domenico da Ferrara (Foligno: 1887).

This is a short manuscript which contains the choreographies for 8 bassadanza. It includes no music, nor is there an introductory section discussing steps. Among the dances are Pelygryna and La Reale.

Guglielmo Ebreo. De praticha seu arte tripudii vulgare opusculum, Ghuglielmi hebrei Pisauriensis. Ms. in Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale (Codex Magliabecchiana-Strozziano XIX, 9, Nr. 88). Published by Francesco Zambrini. Trattato dell'arte del ballo di Guglielmo Ebreo, pesarese (Bologna: 1873). Reprinted by Forni (Bologna: 1968).

This manuscript contains the usual section discussing steps, and a total of thirty four dances, seventeen bassadanza and seventeen balli. As usual, most of the dances can be found in other sources. No music is included.

Guglielmo Ebreo. Trattato della danza composto da Maestro Guglielmo ed in parte cavato dell'opera di Maestro Domenico, Cavaliere Piacentino (n.d.). Ms. in Siena, Biblioteca Comunale (Codex V. 29). Published, with omission of passages agreeing with Zambrini (above) and Roncaglia (below) versions, by Curzio Mazzi. "Una sconosciuta compilazione di un libro quattrocentistico di balli." *La Bibliofilia*. Florence: Anno 16 (1915), pp.185-209.

This source is nearly identical to the above source, except that it includes many dances which are not in the other. It includes a total of sixty four dances, of which thirty are bassadanza and thirty four are balli. This source does not include any music.

Guglielmo Ebreo. Title page absent. Ms. in Modena, Biblioteca Estense (Ital. 82, a.J.9.4. (formerly VII.A.82)). Published by Giovanni Messori Roncaglia. *Della virtute et arte del danzare...* (Modena: 1885).

This manuscript is relatively small, only fifty eight pages, and includes the usual section concerning steps and dancing in general. This is followed by a relatively small number of dances, five bassadanza and ten balli. No music is included.

Guglielmo Ebreo (G. Ambrosio). *Domini Iohannis Ambrosii Pisauriensis de Practica seu arte Tripudii Vulgare Opusculum*. Ms. in Paris, *Bibliothèque Nationale (fonds it. 476)*. Unpublished.

This is a relatively thick manuscript, with some 161 relatively small pages. It is similar in structure to most of the major sources of the period, beginning with the usual section on steps, and proceeding on to specific choreographies. Thirty six choreographies are included, fifteen bassadanza and twenty one balli, as well as the music for them. This source is an excellent place for a person who wishes to begin reconstructing fifteenth century Italian dances to begin, since it includes discussion on steps, music and a large number of interesting dances. The only drawback is, of course, that it is in Italian and has not been translated.

Guglielmo Ebreo. *Guglielmus ebreis pisauriensis de pracha seu arte tripudi vorghare opusculum*. Ms. (dated 6 December 1510 (or possibly 1540)) in Florence, *Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana (Codex Antinori A 13)*. Unpublished.

This source is made up of ninety pages of text, and like the following source, is written in a hand that is very difficult to read. It contains the usual remarks on the art of dancing, and a relatively large section of choreographies. Eighteen bassadanza and twenty one balli are included. No music is given.

Guglielmo Ebreo. Guglielmi ebrei pisaurienses de pracha seu arte tripudi vulghare opuschulam feliciter incipit senper chongratia sia di dio senper. Ms. (originally owned by Giorgio del Giudeo (c. 1470), donated by Walter Toscanini) in New York, Public Library, Dance Collection (Cia Fornaroli Coll. (S) *MGZMB-Res. 72-254). Unpublished.

This manuscript contains some thirty seven large pages of very difficult to read writing. The first nine pages are discussion of dance and how the steps are performed, while the remaining pages give choreographies for fifty five separate balli and bassadanza. No music is included, but many of the dances appear in other manuscripts in which the music is recorded. This manuscript is not for the faint of heart, as the handwriting is almost illegible, and no transcription exists. It does, however, contain a wealth of valuable information. It is also one of the few sources which is in the U.S., which makes it somewhat more available, at least to those who live on the east coast.

Guglielmo Ebreo. Untitled. Ms. fragment in Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale (Fondo Palatino 1021, ff. 105r-106v.). Unpublished.

This is a relatively minor source, being a pair of pages which are all that are left of a Guglielmo manual. They are from the section on how dances are performed, so they are of some use in reconstructing steps. Their use is limited, however, by the fact that they are not that different from the more complete manuals, and by their brevity.

Section I.B -- Fifteenth Century

French/Burgundian Sources

Brussels MS.

Brussels, Bibliotheque Royale, Ms 9085. Facsimile with introduction and transcription by Ernest Closson. Le manuscrit dit des basses danses de la bibliotheque de bourgogne (Brussels: 1912). The above facsimile (with introduction) has been reprinted by Minkoff.

All the manuals discussed in this section except the last are in french, and describe the style of basse dance which was popular in France and Burgundy in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century. These dances are similar to the Italian bassadanza which is described in numerous manuscripts from 1450 until about 1510 (see section I.A). Unlike the Italian sources, the Burgundian manuals contain few complicated dances, and use a much smaller vocabulary of steps.

This manuscript includes a short discussion on steps for the Burgundian style of basse dance, which are processional in nature, beginning with a reverence (i.e. bow) and branle, followed by some combination of single steps, double steps, reprises and branles. The most well-known of these dances in the SCA are Dance de Cleves and Francois Nouvele, both reconstructed from this manuscript. This work includes a list of 59 bassedances, along with music. The music given is only the tenor line, as the musicians were expected to improvise one or two more parts around the base given to the tenor. The introduction by Closson is dated, and has been supplanted by newer scholarship.

Michel Toulouze, pub Michel Toulouze, pub. L'art et instruction de bien dancer (Paris: c. 1488-1496). Published in facsimile with music transcribed and edited by Richard Rastall and translated by A. E. Lequet (New York, Dance Horizons: 1971). Published in facsimile by Minkoff (Geneve: 1985).

This work is considered to be the first printed work on dancing, with all earlier works being manuscripts, and so would have been available to a larger audience than any previous work. Like the Brussles Manuscript above, this work includes a short discussion on steps and a list of 45 basse dances, with the music for their tenor lines. Some dances appear in Brussles or Moderne, as well as here. For the interested scholar who does not read french, this volume is valuable for the translation of the introductory discussion of steps, although the translation is not perfect. It should be noted that the discussion of dancing and in particular the descriptions of steps which appear here and in Brussles and Moderne are far from clear and concise, but must be considered carefully when attempting to interpret the steps. Given an interpretation of the steps, the actual dance choreographies are relatively unambiguous.

Le ballet de la royne de Cessile. Flyleaf choreographies to a copy of Geste des nobles Francoys in Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale (fonds fr. 5699 (formerly fonds fr. 10279)). Dances transcribed in Curt Sachs, World History of the Dance (New York: 1937), pp. 313-314.

This document lists the dances which were performed at a court function in 1445, and includes the choreographies for each dance. Seven dances are listed, but no music is given. The style of the dances is significantly different from the style of Brussles, Toulouze and Moderne, using steps which are not mentioned in any of them, as well as combinations of steps (such as three singles together) which are never used in the other manuals. This work is dated later than any of those three, and may be describing a dance which is more similar to the dance which Arbeau describes.

Jacques Moderne *S'ensuyvent plusieurs basses dances, tant communes que incommunes, comme on pourra veoyr cy dedans (Lyon: press of Jacques Moderne, c. 1532-1533). Only known copy in Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale (Coll. Rothschild, VI-3 bis-66, No. 19). Brief study and edition of the dances published by Francois Lesure. "Dances et chansons a danser au debut du XVIe siecle." Recueil de travaux offerts aM. Clovis Brunel vol. II, pp. 176-184. Facsimile reprint by Minkoff (Geneve: 1985).*

Includes a short discussion on steps and a list of 115 basse dances, although without the music. Many of the dances also appear in Brussels and Toulouze. The introduction given by Moderne is very similar to that given by Toulouze, and may have been a rewriting of it.

Torino Ms *Torino Ms. Untitled single sheet (dated 27 december 1517) in Torino, Archivi Biscaretti (Mazzo 4, No. 14). Published by P. Meyer. "Role de chansons a danser du XVI siecle." Romania. Paris. Vol. 23 (1894), pp. 156-60.*

This sheet includes notation for 20 dances in the style of Brusseles, Moderne and Toulouze, including some dances which are listed in those works. As with Moderne, no music is given; however, the article in Romania suggests some possible tunes for some of the choreographies.

Antonius de Arena *Antonius de Arena. Ad Suos compagniones studentes. (Avignon: c. 1520), and many subsequent editions. Translation by John Guthrie and Marino Zorzi. "Rules of Dancing" in Dance Research, the Journal of the Society for Dance Research. London. Vol. IV, #2, Autumn 1986, pp. 3-53.*

This is a treatise on the basse dance and dance etiquette, written in latin. It was apparently intended for law students at the University of Avignon, who were familiar with some dances but not basse dances. Included are 19 basse dances, but no music. A large part of the text is devoted to telling "middle class" law students what was and was not proper on the dance floor. The instructions which are given for steps are minimal and, as usual, far from clear. They are also difficult to resolve with instructions from other manuals and therefore pose an interesting problem to dance historians.

It has been noted that the choreographies which Arbeau gives for basse dances are included in Arena, which has lead to speculation that Arbeau may have used Arena as a source for a dance which he himself was not completely familiar with. He would certainly have had access to Arena, since it was reprinted in many editions over a span of more than two centuries, with the last reprint being about 1758.

Section I.C -- Fifteenth Century English Sources

Robert Copeland

Robert Copeland. *The manner of dauncynge of bace daunces. Translation of an unknown French source appended to his publication of a French grammar by Alexander Barclay. The introductory to wryte and to pronounce Frenche (London: 1521). Only copy in Oxford, Bodleian Library (Douce B. 507). Published by Mabel Dolmetch. *Dances of England and France from 1450 to 1600 (London: 1949), pp. 2-4. Reprinted by Da Capo Press (New York: 1975).**

This source is very similar to some of the French sources from the fifteenth century, particularly Tolouze, Moderne and the Brussles manuscript, although this source is somewhat more brief. It includes a number of the choreographies which appear in the other sources, although it contains no music and offers fewer choreographies than the French sources. The discussion is also more brief than that in the other sources, but the information which is there is very similar to parts in the others.

Salisbury Ms

Salisbury Ms. *Untitled, undated flyleaf choreographies in copy of Joh. de Janua. *Catholicon (Venice: 1497). Facsimile and transcription with notes published by Daniel Hertz. "The Basse Dance." *Annales Musicologiques, VI (1958-1963), bet. pp. 310-311, pp. 337-340.***

This source offers twenty six choreographies in the style of the French fifteenth century sources. No music is included. Some of the twenty six choreographies are identical, perhaps intended to be danced to different music, although with the same steps. Others are to be found in some of the French manuals of the same period.

Sir Thomas Elyot

Sir Thomas Elyot. *The Boke Named the Governor (London: 1531). Facsimile published by The Scolar Press (Menston, England: 1970). Modern reprint edited by S. E. Lehmborg (London and New York, *Everyman's Library, J. M. Dent & Sons: 1962). (Chapters 19 through 25 deal with dancing).**

The chapters which discuss dancing are interesting, although not of direct use in reconstructing choreographies. No specific choreographies are given, nor is any music included. What is given, however, is information about how dances were done in England at this time. It is fairly clear that the dances were basically similar, if not identical to those which were done in France and Burgundy at this time. We can also glean some style information, so this source is more useful to those working on how the steps were performed than it is to those who are interested only in specific reconstructions.

Section I.D -- Fifteenth Century Spanish Sources

Cervera Ms

Cervera Ms. Untitled, undated (c. 1496) pair of paper sheets preserved in a notarial manual in Cervera, Archivo Historico (fonds notarial 3,3). Facsimile in volume edited by F. Carreras y Candi. Folklore y Costumbres de Espana. 2nd ed. (Barcelona: 1934), vol. I, p. vii; vol. II, p. 303.

This source is two sheets of what appear to be choreographic notations for basse dances. It is of interest primarily because it uses a curious notation to set down the choreographies. The style of the dances is more similar to the Burgundian dances of about the same period than it is to the Italian bassadanza and balli. The sheets do not include music, although some of the titles of the dances correspond to music which is found in other sources.

Section I.E -- Fifteenth Century German Sources

Nurnberg Ms

Nurnberg Ms. "Hie Innen sindt geschriben die wellschen tenntz." Brief, undated (c. 1517) ms. in Nurnberg, Germ. Nat. Mus. (MS 8842). Discussion with facsimile of single page in Ingrid Brainard. "The Art of Courtly Dancing in Transition...", Crossroads of Medieval Civilization..., ed. E. E. Dubruck and K. H. Goller. In Medieval and Renaissance Monograph Series, V (Michigan: Michigan Consortium for Mideval and Early Modern Studies, 1984), pp. 61-79.

This is a small manuscript, consisting of seven pages. It offers eight choreographies, but no music or description of how the steps are performed is included. Dr. Brainard attributes this source to one Johannes Cochlaus, a German who was at the university of Bologna. The manuscript was apparently compiled for a pair of young ladies in Nurnberg, who desired some knowledge of current fashion in Italian dancing, for use at local dances. Most of the included dances appear in the Italian sources of the period, but this source offers a point of view other than that of a dancing master.

Section II.A -- Sixteenth Century Italian Sources

Marco Fabrito Caroso

Marco Fabrito Caroso. Il Ballarino (Venice: 1581). Facsimile reprint by Broude Brothers (New York: 1967).

All the Italian manuals of this period follow a similar format, and discuss dances of the same style. First they discuss steps, usually in fairly great detail, although not always completely clearly. They then go on to give specific choreographies for dances, sometimes including the music in lute tablature or score, or both. As one would expect, they were all originally written in Italian, although English translations exist for some of them.

The step descriptions vary from quite easy to understand to very difficult (the most difficult are usually galliard and canary steps). It should be noted that different authors sometimes call different steps by the same name, or give different names to the same step.

The choreographies which are given are almost always lengthy (the shortest one which I am familiar with takes a couple of minutes to dance, and most of the choreographies are two or three times as long), and are fairly difficult both to dance and to reconstruct. It is clear that the nobles which danced these dances were very skilled dancers who delighted in difficult and complicated figures, which would show their skill.

The general format for most of the dances consists of several sections of relatively simple walking steps (similar to pavan or alman steps), which are fairly easy to reconstruct. Interspersed with these sections are very complicated figures of galliard and canary steps, the simplest of which rival the most difficult which Arbeau describes. These sections can be very difficult to reconstruct with any confidence.

This particular manual, *Il Ballarino*, or *The Dancing Master*, is the first of the Italian manuals of this era to be published. It contains two sections, one on steps and dance manners, and one which contains choreographies. The second section includes eighty dances, with lute tablature for the accompanying music, as well as scores for some of the dances.

Marco Fabrito Caroso. Nobilta di Dame (Venice: 1600). Facsimile reprint by Forni Editore, Bologna. Translated with introduction by J. Sutton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

Caroso's second book is a refinement of the first, to the extent that the cover page subtitles it the "Second Edition of the Book Called Il Ballarino." This is in spite of the fact that only some twenty of the forty-nine dances presented in it duplicate dances found in the previous volume. But while it is not a true second edition, there are many additions and refinements to both the "rules" for the steps and the dances themselves. As a result, any reconstruction of one of the dances which appears in both volumes should rely on the second for the definitive version. Even when reconstructing a dance from Il Ballarino which does not appear in Nobilta di Dame, one should examine the step descriptions in the second volume, since they are in general more clear and precise. Julia Sutton's translation makes this one of the more accessible of the sixteenth century Italian sources, but one should be careful not to rely too heavily on it in creating reconstructions, as there are always nuances lost, however good the translation may be.

Marco Fabrito Caroso. Raccolta di varij balli... (Rome: 1630).

Essentially a reprinting of Nobilta di Dame with a new title.

Cesare Negri

Cesare Negri. Le gratie d'amore (Milan: 1602) Facsimile reprint Broude Brothers (New York: 1969). Translation and Facsimile by Gustavia Yvonne Kendall, "Le Gratie D'Amore" 1602 by Cesare Negri: Translation and Commentary. PhD dissertation (Stanford University: 1985).

Like the other Italian manuals of the sixteenth century, this is a large volume of long and very difficult dances. In particular this volume includes a long discussion on galliard variations, and gives many galliard steps, including steps used for the "kick the tassel" contest. It should be noted that Negri uses some of the same names as Caroso for what seem from the descriptions to be different steps, so one should use care when reconstructing a dance to use the appropriate steps.

On average, the dances which Negri presents are more complicated than those which Caroso offers. That is, the simplest of Negri's dances is more complicated than the simplest of Caroso's; although the most difficult dances of each author are similar in complexity.

Kendall's translation is a very valuable volume, since it offers both a facsimile of the original and a translation. Thus, when reconstructing a dance, it is easy to refer to the original at any point, but the work is also accessible to those who don't know Italian. The translation is not completely reliable, however, and some reference to the facsimile should be made.

Cesare Negri. Nuove inventioni di balli (Milan: 1604).

This volume was a reprint of Negri's previous volume, Le gratie d'amore.

Livio Lupi da Carravagio

Livio Lupi da Carravagio. Libro di gagliarda, tordiglione, passo e mezzo, cannarii e passeggi... (Palermo: 1607).

This is a lengthy volume (about 300 pages) discussing, as the title suggests, galliards, tordions, passo e mezzo and canaries. It opens with a short discussion of steps and choreographies for two dances. The majority of the volume, however, is devoted to describing hundreds of short sequences of galliards, tordions, etc. These are apparently intended for use when one needed to "invent" a galliard or other variation. The reader would memorize and practice several passages from each section, so as to have them ready at need. It is difficult to imagine anyone memorizing all of the literally hundreds of variations offered here, but it is clear that no one would have been considered an accomplished dancer without knowing a few (or better yet, being able to invent them as needed). All in all, an interesting volume, but not as generally useful as either of Caroso's works or Negri's book.

***Propero Luti de
Sulmona***

Propero Luti de Sulmona. Opera bellissima nella quale si contengono molte partite, et passeggi di gagliarda... (Perugia: 1589).

This work is similar to that of Lupi above, but much shorter. The discussion of steps is a single page, speaking mostly about caprioles, and only some thirty-two variations are presented. Only galliard variations are discussed.

Il Papa Ms

Il Papa Ms. New York, Public Library, Dance Collection (Cia Fornaroli Coll. *ZBD-26); Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale (Codex Magliabecchiana-Strozziano XIXm cod. 31).

This is a relatively short manuscript, made up of some fourteen double sided pages. It is written in a hand which is fairly difficult to make out, and contains no music for its dances. The first two pages are introductory in nature, and discuss dance in general. The remaining twelve pages contain a total of fifteen dance choreographies. Some of these choreographies are relatively long, while others are quite short, as short or shorter than the shortest offered by Caroso. Although this is a relatively minor source from this period, it is available in the US.

***Felippo de gli
Alessandri***

Felippo de gli Alessandri. Discorso sopra il ballo (Terni: 1620).

I have not been able to run down a copy of this source at all. If anyone has a copy or knows where one can be obtained, I would love to hear about it!

Section II.B -- Sixteenth Century French Sources

Thoinot Arbeau

Thoinot Arbeau (Anagram for Jehan Tabourot). Orchesographie (Lengres: 1589; 2nd ed. 1596). Translated by Cyril W. Beaumont (London: 1925; reprinted by Dance Horizons, New York: 1968). Translated by Mary S. Evans (Kamin Dance Pub., 1948; reprinted with introduction and notes by Julia Sutton and labanotation by M. Becker and J. Sutton by Dover Pub., New York: 1967).

This manual is the best known original source within the SCA, because of its wide availability. It contains a wide variety of dances, many fairly simple in description and therefore easy to reconstruct. As with most manuals of the time, the more complicated instructions are open to multiple interpretations, and are often very confusing. Attempts to reconstruct these dances are best done with reference to the original French, since there are many nuances lost in translation. This is a work worthy of being re-examined from time to time, as one will often rediscover some detail which had been forgotten. Persons interested in learning about reconstructions may want to start with this work, since it offers the opportunity to examine descriptions of dances which one already knows, and see how other people have reconstructed dances.

Francois de Lauze

Francois de Lauze. Apologie de la Danse (n.p.: 1623). Facsimile reprint by Minkoff (Geneva: 1977). Modern reprint with translation and notes by Joan Wildeblood (London: Frederick Muller Ltd, 1952).

This manual describes in great detail a number of the dances popular in the early seventeenth century, including the courante, several different bransles, the galliard, as well as a few words on the gavotte. One interesting feature is that the work is composed of two separate manuals, one for gentlemen, and the other for ladies. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first dance manual which indicates that the man is doing steps (other than the bow) which are significantly different from those which the woman is doing. The manual is dedicated to George Villiers, then Marquis of Buckingham.

The descriptions are probably meant to discuss the same movements which Arbeau and others describe (de Lauze actually refers the reader to Arbeau in one instance), but de Lauze's descriptions are so detailed and involved that it is difficult to understand what he is trying to get across. Thus, while this is a valuable work, it is very difficult to make definitive interpretations of the descriptions. One cannot help but feel, however, that careful reading of the manual and much work would yield some very valuable insights. In short, this manual offers a lot of promise, but ought not to be tackled unless one is willing to exert a great deal of effort.

B. de Montagut

B. de Montagut. "Lovange de la Dance" (c.1623). Ms. in London, British Museum (MS Royal 16E, 37-39). Unpublished.

Like the above manual by de Lauze, this describes early seventeenth century court dancing, in which one can see the beginnings of what will become baroque dance in the next century. It begins with a discussion of the "principles" of dance, continues with a section on the reverence, followed by detailed discussions of the courante, bransles and galliades (with a specific section discussing the capriole).

This work is similar in many ways to that of de Lauze, even being dedicated to the same gentleman, George Villiers, Marquis of Buckingham, who was apparently an avid dancer. Like de Lauze, Montagut also gives very detailed instructions, and like de Lauze, his instructions are difficult to follow. Nevertheless, they contain considerably more information on the courante than any other sources, and they go into considerable detail on the fine points of the dances they describe, which cannot be said of many other manuals of the time.

Section II.C -- Sixteenth Century

English Sources

Sir John Davies

Sir John Davies. Orchestra, a poem of dancing (London: 1594). Various modern reprints.

This is an Elizabethan poem which celebrates dancing as an art, and in particular indicates that the dancing which was done at the time in the court of Elizabeth I was the ultimate form of the art. The poem is of interest to dance historians in that it includes some passages which describe the dancing of the time. These passages are not very detailed, however, so their value lies mostly in providing some supporting evidence for interpretations of steps and dance forms which are described in more detail in other sources.

Thomas Morley

Thomas Morley. A Plaine and easie introduction to practicall musicke (1597; 2nd ed. 1608). Modern reprint edited by R. Alec Harmon (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1952).

This work is primarily a music text, but some comments are offered on dance music. It is useful in the same way that Orchestra is useful.

- Inns of Court Mss** ***Inns of Court Mss. Six manuscripts all originally relating to dancing at the London Inns of Court: Oxford, Bodleian Library (Rawl. Poet. 108) (c. 1570). London, British Museum Library (Harley 367) (n.d.). Oxford, Bodleian Library (Douce 280) (c. 1606). Oxford, Bodleian Library (Rawl. D. 864) (c. 1630). London, Inner Temple Library (Misc. Vol. XXVII) (mid. 17th century). London, Royal College of Music (Ms. 1119) (mid. 17th century). All mss. have been transcribed by James P. Cunningham. Dancing in the Inns of Court (London: Jordan and Sons Ltd, 1965). Also transcribed with commentary by D. R. Wilson. "Dancing in the Inns of Court" Historical Dance, Vol. 2 No. 5, 1986/87. pp. 3-16.***

These manuscripts describe the dancing which was done during the early seventeenth century at the four London Inns of Court. Dancing at the Inns of Court consisted of a fixed program of dances, beginning with pavans and almains, and followed by galliards, corantos and branles. These manuscripts are probably notes for the dancers, to remind themselves of the steps and patterns of the dances, and as such can be difficult to understand, particularly for the more complicated dances.

Of the two transcriptions, Wilson's is the better, having Cunningham to draw on. Wilson also points out a number of flaws in Cunningham's transcriptions, which are worth examining. Cunningham, on the other hand, gives more background on the Inns of Court and gives a great many quotes from accounts which describe the dancing, expanding on the text which is given in the manuscripts themselves.

- John Playford** ***John Playford. The English dancing master (London: 1651; and many subsequent editions). Facsimile reprint with introduction and notes by Margaret Dean-Smith (London: Schott & Co. Ltd, 1957). Modern reprint with music in modern notation by Hugh Mellor and Leslie Bridgewater (London: 1933); reprinted by Dance Horizons (New York: n.d.).***

Most SCA people are familiar with some English country dances, which are at least as popular as Arbeau's dances. This is due in part to the fact that there are organizations outside the SCA which have done considerable research into these dances. It should be remembered, however, that many of the dances which are commonly done by such groups come from later editions than Playford's original publication, or from other sources stretching all the way to the late eighteenth century.

In any case, the dances which are described by Playford in his 1651 edition are relatively easy, and are mostly combinations of a fairly small vocabulary of steps, so they are fairly easy to reconstruct. Along with Arbeau's Orchesography, this is the most accessible of the original sources, and can serve as a good starting point for aspiring dance masters. One disadvantage, the fact that the music given with the dances is only a single line, has been offset by the publication in recent years of a number of booklets of early Playford dance tunes with full arrangements, as well as a number of recordings for the dance master who doesn't have musicians at his or her command.

Section II.D -- Sixteenth Century

Spanish Sources

Reglas de dancar ***"Reglas de dancar." Ms. in Madrid, Biblioteca del Real Academia (Coll. Salazar, Th. fol. 149v del T.N. 25).***

This source is a pair of pages. I have not been able to obtain a copy of this source, so I am unable to comment on the contents, but as it is only a couple of pages, I expect that it is only valuable when taken in conjunction with other, more extensive sources.

Manuscrit del Hospital ***"Manuscrit del Hospital" (Tarrago). Flyleaf Ms. (in Catalan) in Barcelona, Biblioteca Centrale (formerly Hospital de la Santa Creu). Facsimile in Fancesca Pujol and Joan Amades. Canconer popular de Catalunya. Vol. I. Diccionari de la Danza... (Barcelona: 1936).***

This source is a page which describes a number of sixteenth century dances in textual form, followed by a notational form for some dances, including some of the dances which are described in the text. There is writing on both sides of the page, although more on one side than on the other. Some of the text is fragmentary, since the page was used at some time as part of the binding of a book. The source is not of great use to the reconstructor, as there is no music, and no description of the steps (although one could assume steps similar to those described in other sixteenth century sources). A portion of this source is reproduced in the Diccionari de la Danza referenced above.

Juan de Esquivel Navarro ***Juan de Esquivel Navarro. Discursos sobre el arte del dancado (Seville: 1642; Madrid: 1647?).***

This is a relatively short (about fifty pages) manual from the mid seventeenth century. It is of interest partly because it describes steps and dances which do not seem to appear elsewhere. Much of what is discussed seems to be galliard variations, which may have been local favorites. It may also be that Navarro gives different names to steps which are described elsewhere. In any case, it is worthy of further research, although it is a little out of the SCA period (still, if we are using Playford, which is first published almost ten years after this, I think this is justified).

Section II.E -- Sixteenth Century

German Sources

Michael Pretorius

Michael Pretorius. Terpsichore (Wolfenbittel: 1612). Reprinted by LaNove Davenport (New York: Associated Music Publishers, 1969).

Like Morley's work above, this is primarily a work concerning music, not dance. However, it is music for dancing and includes some notes which are of interest.

Michael Pretorius. Syntagma Musicum (Wolfenbittel: 1619). Facsimile reprint by Nachdruck hrsg. von W. Gurlitt (Kassel, Barenreiter: 1958-59).

This volume is similar to Terpsichore, but treats musical theory more than specific musical pieces. Like the others, it is useful mostly as supporting evidence for steps and dancing practices, rather than as a source for specific choreographies.
