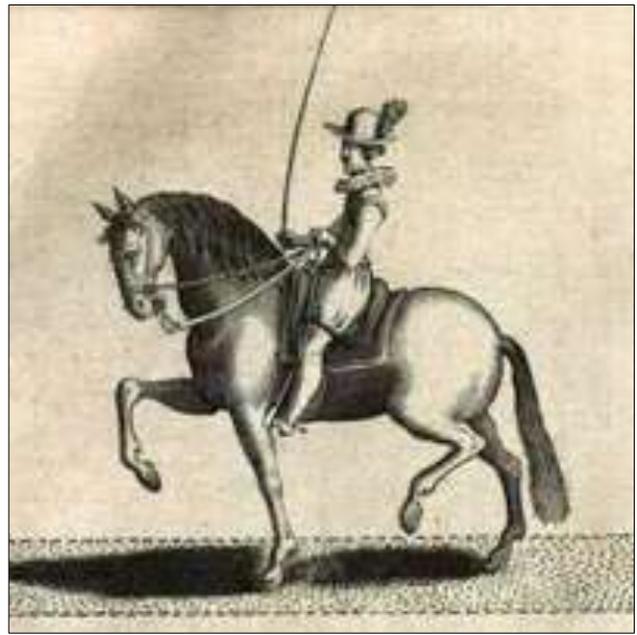


# How to Ride Before a Prince

A short version for weekend events, adapted from the full workshop developed and taught by Mistress Bridget Reade of Dunvegan (Jennifer Jobst). Presented by Mistress Annisa Gabrieli.



Fiaschi- performing before an audience, 1556; de la Noue, 1620

## In Introduction- Riding as an Art Form

"How To Ride Before a Prince" is based on the many 16th and 17th century horsemanship manuals written to instruct riders how to train, ride and present themselves as fitting to their noble station. The books are founded in the needs of military purpose, but go beyond the purely functional in instructing how to display one's prowess and grace to an audience. The manuals contain many movements and exercises designed to train the horse and rider for combat, as well as specific movements and figures that would both please an audience and demonstrate the skills which the rider and horse should display.

The most essential movement for military maneuvering is the *Passade, Repelone, or Manege*, which consists of two small circles- "voltes", or "pirouettes"- connected by a straight line, and exercises training for this deceptively complicated movement are combined in different ways. A demonstration of prowess would emphasize this skill, and the *Manege* features in Grisone's elaborate description of a performance of horsemanship. The patterns become more and more precise as the training progresses, including changes in gait and "high school" movements requiring a great degree of collection. Unlike modern dressage, these displays were not specifically prescribed patterns, but concentrated on choosing movements to emphasize the best qualities of the rider and his mount.

In the SCA, Mistress Bridget has adapted this combination of training patterns and noble display as a competition. Riders select a combination of documented movements from the provided sources, present their list to the judges, and then perform the movements. As in the original manuals, the goal is to show off the horse and rider to their strengths. So, if your horse doesn't half-pass well, then don't include that movement! The point of the presentation is perfecting the comportment of both horse and rider, to demonstrate the elegance of the unity between the two for the judges and audience.

For this short series, I have selected a few maneuvers that you can combine to emphasize your and your horse's strengths. I strongly encourage you to read the original sources in the linked bibliography and experiment with more movements and interpretations.

## Comportment of the Rider:



The rider's body position was of utmost importance to the period riding masters. A rider who could not sit a horse properly and have the horse perform obediently was essentially no rider at all! But what exactly did it mean to sit a horse properly? The period masters had plenty to say on this topic:

“You must also carry your body straight and firm, with your face upward, and your legs comely...”  
(Corte, p. 92)

“...that all those horsemen who will be seen publicly must endeavor to follow with rhythm, with the waist and the limbs, and as much with head and arms as with legs and feet; always doing everything to appear as graceful as they can on horseback, because in addition to making a good show of themselves, they will also help the horse who will appear more elegant and better in that type of manege.” (Fiaschi, p.127)

“And see that you do not only sit him boldly, and without fear, but also conceive with yourself, that he and you do make as it were but one will. And accompany him with your body in any moving that he makes, always beholding his head right between his ears, so as your nose may directly his foretop. Which shall be a sign unto you to know thereby, whither you sit right in your saddle or not.” (Grisone, p. 43)

These quotes give us a general description of what the rider should look like atop a horse. For a clearer picture, we may consider the parts of the rider's body separately. Riders were instructed to hold the reins with one hand, like so:

“... as touching the reins, you must hold them in your left hand, so as the little finger, and ring finger too (if you will) may always be placed between the two reins and the thumb close upon the reins, with the brawn thereof turned toward the pommel of the saddle, and being thus closed together in your fist...”  
(Astley, p. 57-58)

Lest the modern re-enactor believe that the reins were only ever held in the left hand, there are many period drawings of the reins being held in the right hand, and there are also instructions on how to ride two-handed:

“... for then having the right rein in the right hand, and the left rein in the left hand, they may be drawn on either side in a reasonable manner.” (Astley, p. 30)

Once the rider's reins and arm were properly positioned, it was time to practice one of the many exercises recommended for training horses. Since small, quick turns were required of the horse, the quiet and minimal use of the hands and reins for such maneuvers was discussed:

"For who so will have his horse rein well: let him bear his hand rather low than high, so shall he be able to keep it always at one stay, which is one of the chiefest points of horsemanship. Notwithstanding, if your horse be anything headstrong, then when you *manege* him, or otherwise handle him, bear not too stiff a hand, but rather somewhat light and temperate, for the more you force him, the less he will yield. And remember always when you turn your horse, to draw neither your arm nor hand more of one side then of another, but to keep it even with the horse's crest, and only by turning your fist a little inward, or outward, to signify unto him to turn." (Grisone, ch. XI, trans. Blundeville)

Stopping "justly" (square) was also important, and the hands and body played an important role in stopping the horse with his rump underneath him. Period riding masters were aware that stopping a horse with only the reins was not the best way to get a precise stop - instead, the entire body should be used:

"... even to stop, at that which you must not draw your hand hastily to you, but even with a little sway of your body back, and your hand together... and let your hand with your body go to their place again." (Astley, p. 51)

The period masters also placed great emphasis on how the rider should use their body, legs, and seat in order to appear more comely:

"... settle yourself just in the midst of the saddle, letting your legs fall in due order, neither putting them too much forward, nor too much backward, nor too near, nor too far from the horse's belly, staying your feet upon the stirrups, as they ought to be, turning your toes somewhat towards the horse's shoulder, and settling yourself upon the stirrups, yet not so hard as though your feet were grown out of them. ... The surest hold and stay you must have on horseback shall consist not in the stirrups, but in your knees and thighs, which ought to be as ever as it were made fast or nailed to in the saddle: but from the knees downward let your legs be loose and at free liberty..." (Corte, p. 34)

But the entire purpose of perfecting the comportment of both horse and rider was to demonstrate the elegance of the unity between the two:

"... so as these two several bodies may seem in all their actions and motions to be as it were only one body." (Astley, p. 5)



## Comportment of the Horse:



The riding masters of the mid sixteenth century had definite ideas of what was proper for both horse and rider. In general, the Italians looked for **an arched neck carriage, the horse's face perpendicular to the ground, and the haunches tucked well under the horse, making the forehand light** (refer to the woodcut from Fiaschi above). Head and neck carriage were considered very important, given how frequently they were discussed in period riding manuals. For example, Astley (1584) says:

“... that all his doings should be upon a steady hand, a just, placed, and settled head, with a pleasant mouth upon the bit, which he (Grisone) accomplished to be a chief point and whole substance of horsemanship.” Astley, p. 42)

Despite the emphasis on the appropriate carriage of the head and neck, the haunches were not neglected. In fact, many of the period airs above the ground require an extremely collected horse who carries much of his weight on his hindquarters, ready to pivot his shoulders one way or another at a moment's notice. There were several exercises recommended by the Italian masters to assist the horse in achieving collection. For example, when stopping the horse, Corte recommends:

“Likewise when the horse comes to stop, the rider shall greatly help him, by casting his body backwards, which will cause him to stop low behind, even as were upon his buttocks.” (Corte, p. 70)

Fiaschi emphasized that the horse should keep a constant rhythm in all his gaits, so much so that many of his exercises are accompanied by woodcuts with musical notes that define the rhythm of the movement.

“In this second part of the treatise I intend... [to show] ... some acts of riders on horseback and their horse tracks and the time in Music of some exercises so that no one can be blamed every time that he performs them if following these instructions.” (Fiaschi, p. 87 trans. Tomassini)



“The meneggio with the measure of a step and a jump, in time to music, with the horse and rider together.” (Fiaschi, p. 105, trans. Jobst)

The goal was a reliable, obedient horse, so most of the masters caution not to push the horse too far, and not to progress from one lesson to the next unless the first lessons can be done flawlessly:

“But let him not gallop, until he be fully perfect upon the trot, and in his speedy trot you must keep your seat and hand firm, so as he may not lose his orderly and comely form before prescribed.” (Astley, p. 50)

In addition, there are warnings about the rigors of doing airs above the ground - that they should not be done too soon, that they should not be done with a horse who is not strong, and that they should not be done too frequently:

“... no horse should be learned to make the Corvette when he is over young, nor till such time as he be perfect in all the lessons aforesaid...” (Corte, p. 46)

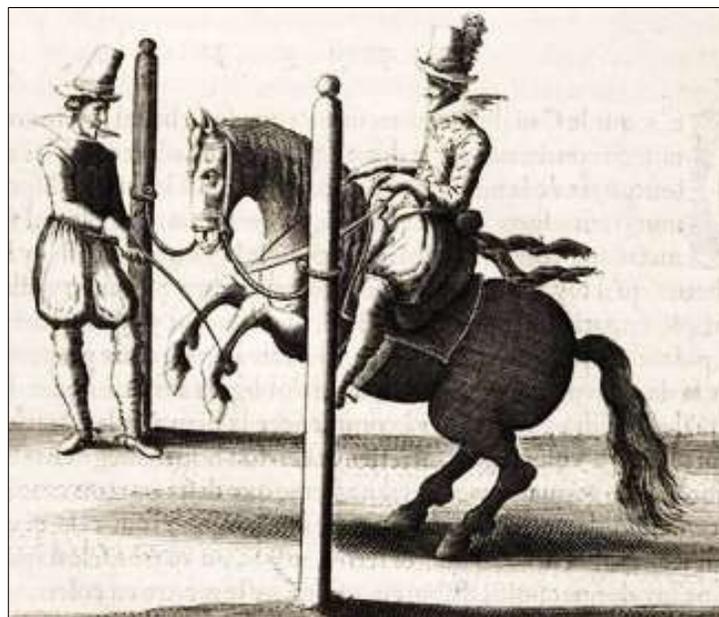
While some high school movements such as terre-a-terre appear to have been used in military maneuvering, the fancier jumps seem to have been more for show. The period masters specifically cautioned against teaching such airs to a war horse:

“... if you want to make some pesades (stopping on the haunches and lifting the forehand off the ground several times), they should not be very high, because, besides that it would be ugly to see a horse who is accustomed in this way, it would also be detrimental every time that he would behave like this while he’s given encounter, because he could be easily knocked to the ground. This is what I dislike of so many pesades, especially in a war-horse.” (Fiaschi, p. 99, trans. Tomassini)

“But the one who would train a very fast horse, or one particularly suited to war, to these jumps and exercises, would be a fool, because in military operations they would rather produce hindrance and damage instead of any benefit to the Rider, as we have already said before.” (Caracciolo, p. 426, trans. Tomassini)

Instead, the airs above the ground were to be used primarily because they were attractive to onlookers, as we have seen in Grisone’s description of how to ride before a Prince:

“Maybe someone will consider useless and vain that a man toils to teach these jumps to his horse; but he is wrong, because in addition to the fact that a horse that goes swaying from jump to jump it is beautiful to see, certainly, by lightening his arms and legs through these exercises, he becomes more agile and more ready for all the other virtues that are required.” (Caracciolo, p. 426, trans. Tomassini)



### **Putting it all together:**

Noble horsemen showing off their riding skill to entertain an audience is nothing new. Virgil, writing in the *Aeneid* in the first century BC, describes a display of cavalry maneuvers at the funeral of Aeneas' father. The riders –

"...first galloped apart in equal detachments, then in half sections of three broke ranks and deployed their band as in a dance; and then, at another order, they turned about and charged with lances couched. Next they entered upon other figures too, and reversed these figures, with rank facing rank across a space between; and they rode right and left in intertwining circles. And they began a pretense of armed battle, sometimes exposing their backs in flight and sometimes turning their spear-points for attack. Then they made peace again and rode along in an even line." (Virgil, *Aeneid* 70-19 BC)

During the period of the “Classical Masters”, tips and instructions for impressing viewers abound. Grisone goes into the most detail. Excerpted from *Gli Ordini di Calvalcare* (1550), translated by Blundeville (1560):

### **“Howe to ryde a horse to the best shew before a Prynce”**

[I have modernized the spelling from here onward, and truncated it in the interest of making it quicker to read. See the bibliography for the original text sources]

#### **First, on where the audience should stand to watch you:**

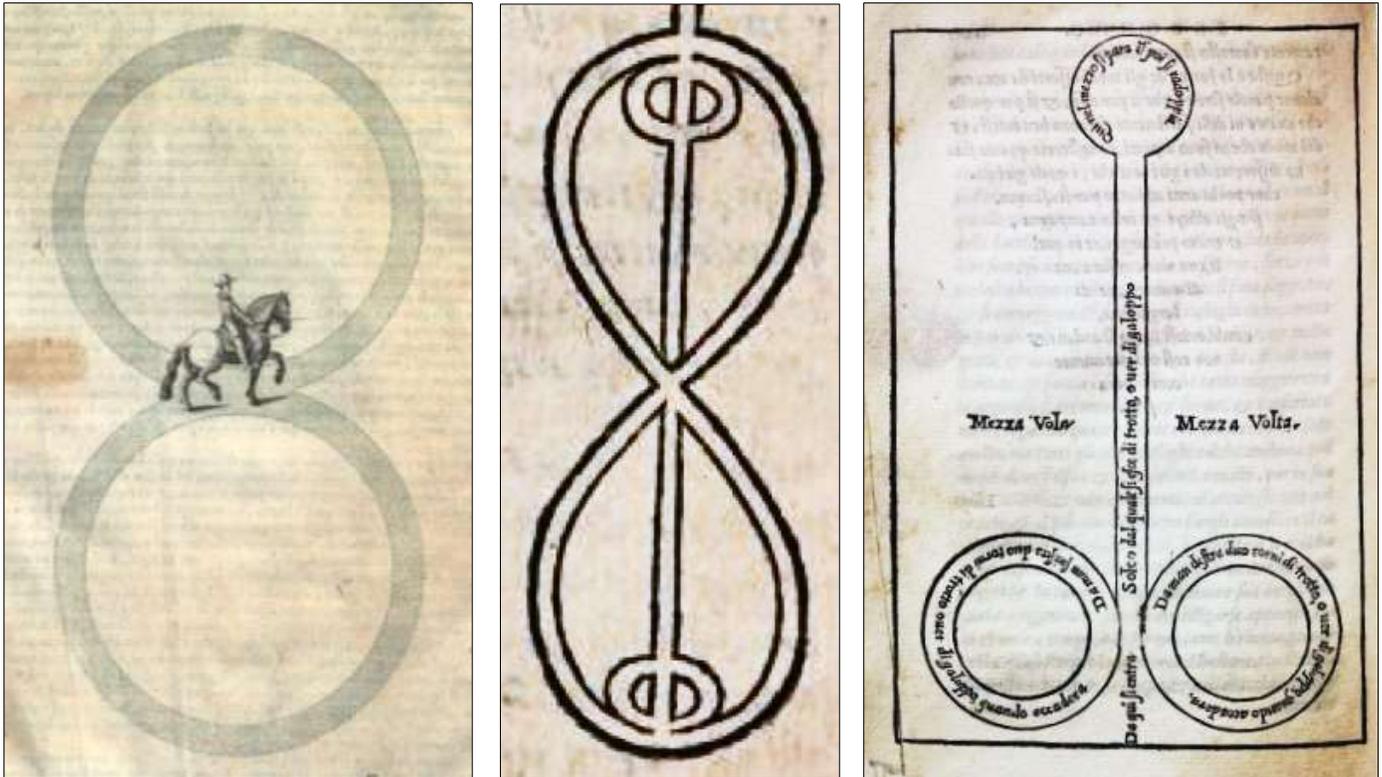
“Some do think it good for those that would see, to stand right before the stopping place, and some would have them to stand on the right hand of the Rider, even with the stopping place, and some, on the same hand down toward the middle Carere. Of all which, that right before the stopping place, in my judgment is worst for two causes: first for that the room perhaps may be [too small] to receive any number of men: Second it is perilous. For if the horse be headstrong and should chance to break the bridle, the reins or port mouths of his bridle, he might run headlong upon the lookers on. And therefore I would not wish a Prince or noble man to take view of a horse in that place, unless it were from a house out of a window or from some scaffold. But rather to stand on the one side toward the middle Carere, a distance from the stopping place... so shall he stand without danger, and see the beginning, the middle, and ending, and it should be so much the better, if he stand on the right hand of the Rider, for so the Rider at both ends of the maneing path... shall turn his face always towards the Prince, and not his back. The place of standing then being thus appointed, and the Prince there ready to behold what your horse can do.”

#### **Second, on how you should proceed with your demonstration of skill:**

“Ride first fair and softly toward the Prince, and do your reverence. That done, depart with a good round trot toward the farthest end of the Carere path, bearing your rod with the point upward, towards your right shoulder, according as I have taught you heretofore, and being come to the end, let the point of your rod fall toward the left shoulder of your horse, and make him to turn a half turn on the right hand, and then to stay a little while. That being done, pass him forward, for three or four steps fair and softly, and immediately after, put spurs unto him, giving him a lively, swift, and lusty Carere, and pass before the Prince unto the place of stopping, whereas after that he hath stopped even upon his buttocks, then at the first, second, or third bound of his advancing, according to that kind of manege that you will use, or that the horse can do most readily: you shall turn him on the right hand, and so go back again in the self same path, and there stop him, and turn him on the left hand. And so observing always one time and measure, manege him to and fro, as often together as you shall think meet, but let the last stop be at the end where the Prince stands. And after that you have stopped your horse, make him to double on each hand once or twice together, and immediately after, or else before, entertain him with the Capriole and Corvetti. That done, go to the end of the Carere path, and give him a lively Carere, stopping him a little before you come at the Prince, and after that he hath advanced, let him double as before. Also after he hath run, stopped and advanced, let him breathe awhile in the self same place, and then give him what kind of manege you shall think good, wherein good [discretion] must be used to consider the quality, strength and condition of the horse, to the intent that order, time and measure may be kept accordingly.”

## Movements-

This section provides a small sample of movements. It is useful to note that *manege*, *maneggio*, *passade*, *repelone* are all similar movements which involve a straight path connecting two voltes. This is the essential maneuver used in mounted combat (*tourney*), and many of the other exercises shown are building blocks to train the horse for the balance and elevation needed to perform this movement flawlessly. Many movements are made up of circles and arcs. If you've ever worked on riding a perfect circle, you'll know that it builds many skills. The rider must pay close attention to both inside and outside aids, and support the horse in a constantly adapting way in order to create the precise pattern- and keep the steady rhythm that Fiaschi so valued!



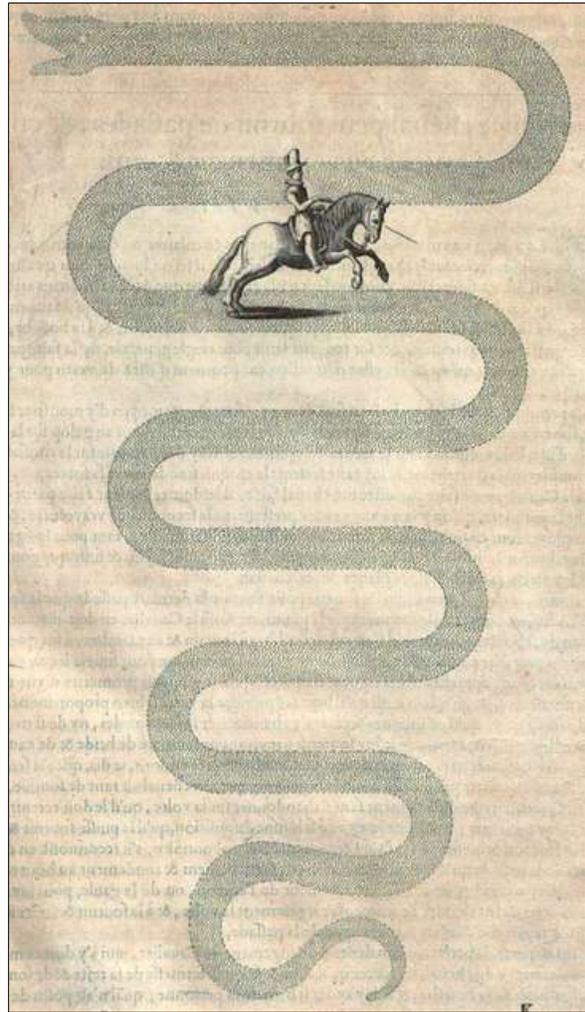
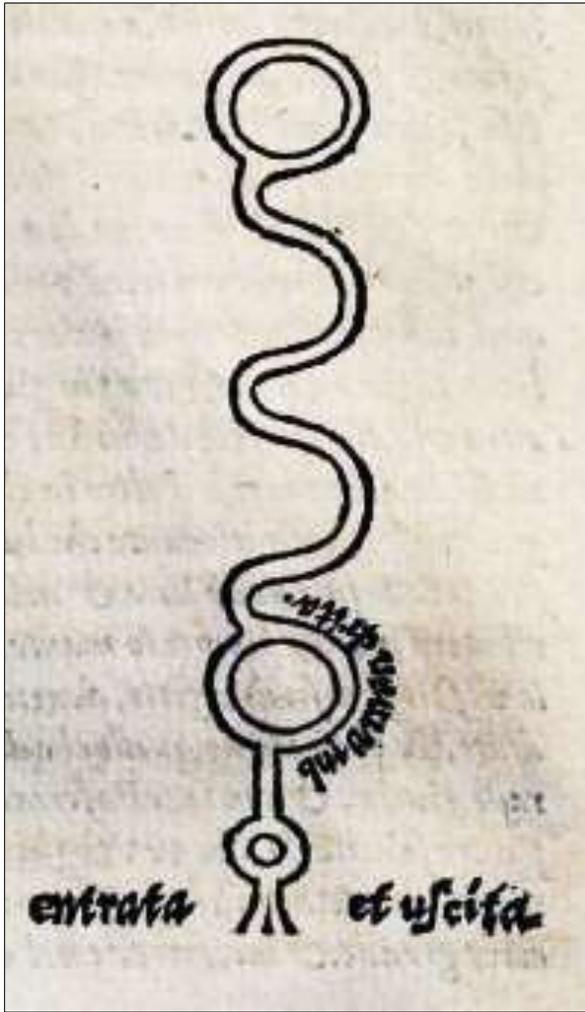
**Left: de la Noue, 1620.** Simple figure 8, or change of hand.

**Center, Corte, 1573. Esse serrato.** The horse performs a figure eight with a volte at the top of each loop.

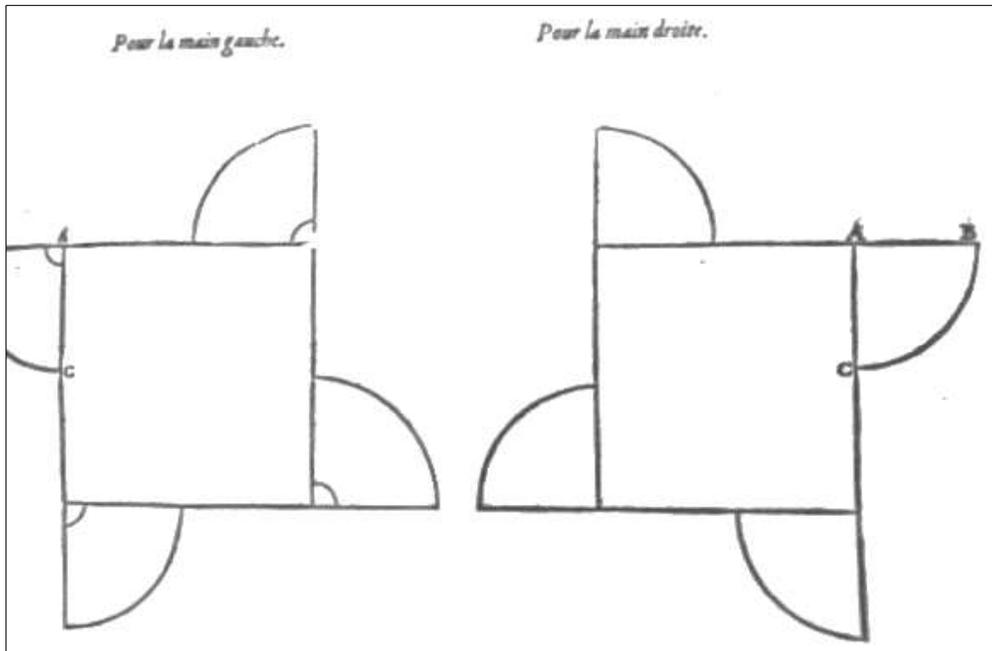
**Right: Grisone, 1550. Tourni.** The horse makes two small circles (voltes) to the right, then two to the left, after which the horse proceeds in a straight line at either the trot or canter. At the end of the line, the horse performs a “raddoppio” (also called doubling, or modernly, a pirouette).

*“And note that in turning diverse things are to be observed. First that he brings the contrary leg upon the other, ... also that he keep always one path, and that he neither presses forward, nor yet reel back in his turning, also that he keep his body in one stay, writhing neither head, neck, nor any part of his body, but to come in whole and round together, and close his turn in so narrow a row as may be.”*

So crossing the forelegs during the turn, and keeping the whole maneuver controlled, calm, balanced, and on the spot, were the way to impress the viewer. Note also that the surviving arenas from this time period are quite small by today's standards- 30 x 90 feet is one example. The serpentine below, with eight changes of direction, is quite a fine movement, which helps the horse learn to lift his shoulders in order to turn in such tight space.

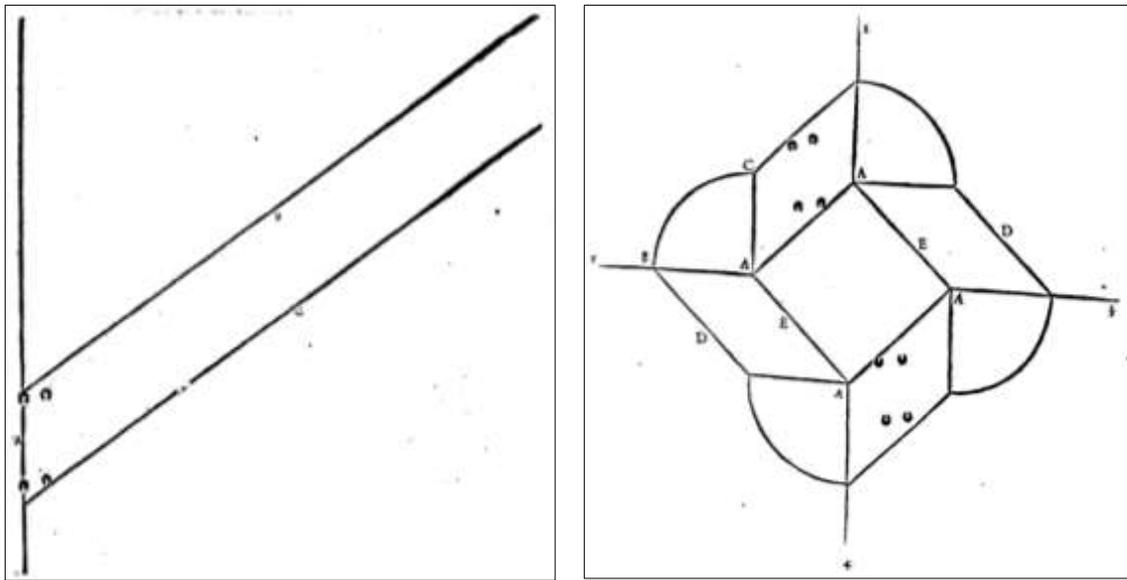


Left: Corte, 1573. Serpeggiare. A serpentine, repeated with a tourni at each end.  
 Right: de la Noue, 1620. Serpentine, reducing the loops gradually until it's nearly a volte.



Above: De la Broue, 1602. A square ridden straight ahead, with quarter turns on the hindquarters at each corner.

**Bias (lateral) movements:**

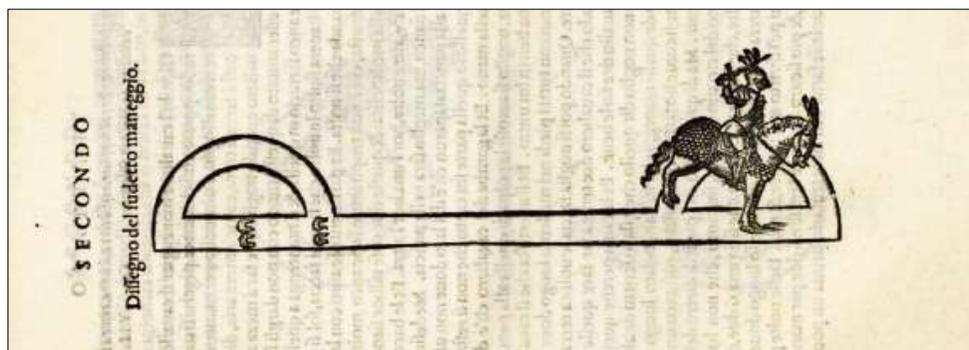


**Left: De la Broue, 1602.** “By the line of the letter A , one can judge what is straight, and this must be maintained without the horse bending the body or the neck. Track B represents the track that must be taken first by the right front foot. And the line of C shows the track of the hind foot.” (trans. Jobst)

**Right: De le Broue, 1602.** Bias square with quarter turns on the hindquarters. This is similar to the square movement above, except that the straight paths are replaced with diagonal movement (leg-yield or half-pass). “To finish the first figure, make one more quarter, similar to the others.” (trans. Jobst)

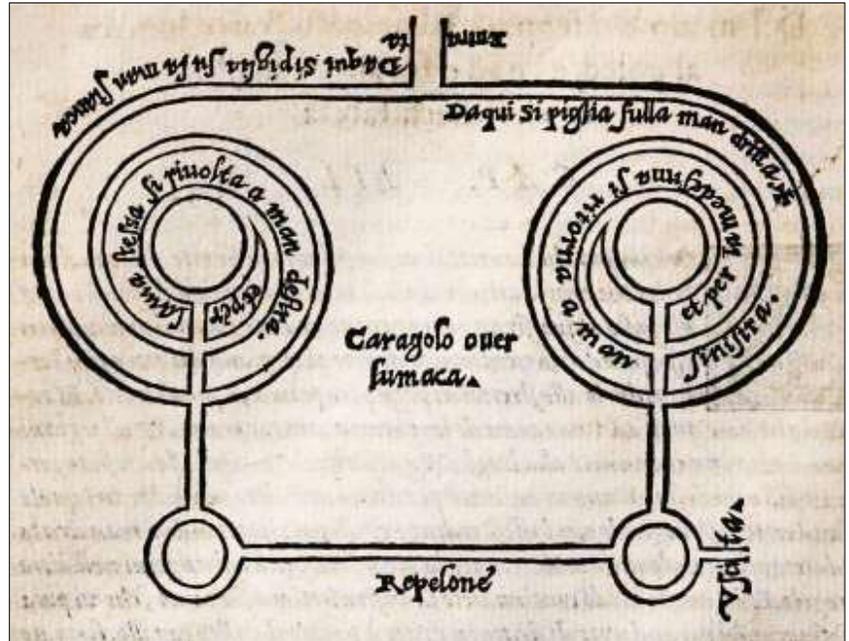


**Above: Fiaschi, 1556.** Retiring, or backing the horse. Note the calm, balanced compoment of horse and rider.



Fiaschi, 1556, volta d'anche (volte of the haunches). After going in a straight line, the horse performs a turn on the forehand.

Spirals:

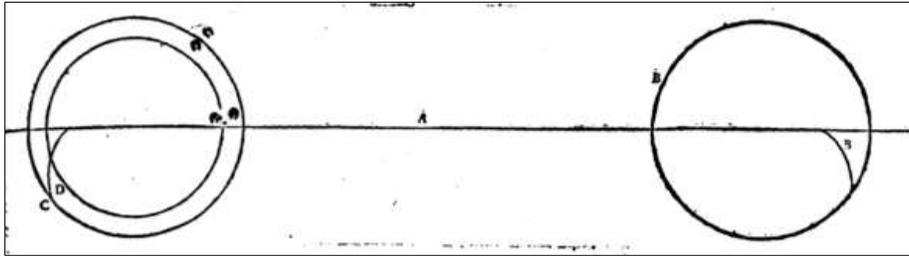


Left: De la Noue, 1620. An inward spiral in a single direction, exiting from the center.

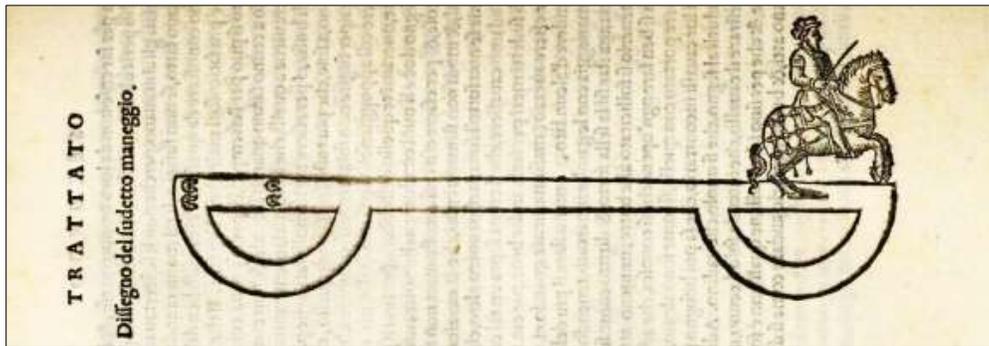
Right: Corte, 1573. Caragolo over Lumaca- Ramshorn, or Snail. A spiral, *repelone*, and a spiral in the other direction. “Repelone” is similar to Passade and Maneggio, where the rider makes a pivot in place, runs a straight line, pivots again, and repeats. The exact order of operations of this pattern is up to some interpretation. However, it is clearly described in the text as a good movement for impressing viewers: “...and in the end of the ramshorn, the eyes of the surrounding people were not taken by marvelous beauty, and delighted in such handling, and that they did not fall in love. What an artifice, no doubt, demonstrates ease, looseness, leeway, good strength, and great obedience in the horse, and much skill in the Knight...”

Working on a spiral adds another degree of difficulty to the circle, as the rider must pay close attention to the path, making each loop slightly smaller than the one before, and still around the same center point. The smaller the loop, the more difficult it is for the horse to maintain balance and rhythm, so the rider must assist, and encourage the horse to take shorter steps, shifting its weight back onto the haunches.

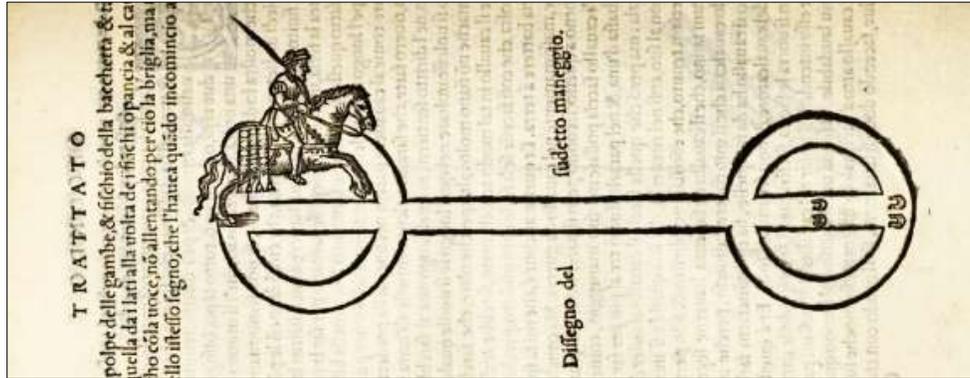
These movements focus solely on the *Passade* or *Maneggio*, a cavalry and combat maneuver used to get in and out of engagement quickly. It consists of a straight line, a *volte* or *pirouette*, a return to the starting place, and another *volte* or *pirouette*. If you watch the best mounted combat riders in action, you will notice this movement in frequent use.



De le Broue, 1602. *Passade* at the trot.



Fiaschi, 1556, *maneggi di mezzo tempo*. After going in a straight line, the horse turns on his hind legs in a half *pirouette*.



Fiaschi, 1556, *maneggio di una volta e mezza (a volte and a half)*. After going in a straight line, the horse performs a *pirouette* and a half, then returns to the track.



De la Noue, 1620. *Applied Passade*.

## Glossary

**Advance** - Whereupon, when coming to a halt at the end of a menage, the horse picks up his front feet a few times while his back feet stay on the ground. Also referred to by some authors as a pesade.

### **Carere, Carrere, Carriera** –

(n.) An area or other place or track which is used to exercise horses.

“... wheeling to and fro forward as it were the length of a short carriera... you shall return to the other end of the carriera...” (Corte, p. 30)

(v.) Performing a particular exercise on horseback.

“... to find the will and disposition of the horse, not only in his trot, but also in his gallop, carriera, and stop...” (Corte p. 31)

**Courbette, Corvetta, Corvetty, Corvetti** - The horse rears up on his hind legs, then “bunny hops” repeatedly, each time landing on his hind legs.

“Corvetta is that motion, which the crow maketh, when without flying she leaps and jumps upon the ground.” (Corte, p. 46)

**Doubling** - A volte on two tracks, modernly called a pirouette.

**Gallop** - The 16th century term for a canter or lope. Corte recommended that a young horse not be cantered until he had been under saddle for two months and could “trot well and be settled of the head...” (Corte p. 28)

“... and suddenly put him forth upon his trot, and frankly fall into a gallop...” (Corte, p. 31)

**Maneggi, menage, passade** - The fundamental exercise in the art of fighting on horseback. It involves cantering a straight line, then stopping and turning immediately before cantering back in the opposite direction. Also used to describe specific exercises.

“Another kind of manage there is, which may be likened unto an S... The profit that comes by this kind of manage is great...” (Corte, p. 13)

**Pesade, pessate, posata** - Where the horse stops on his haunches and raises his front legs off the ground several times. The horse was then often asked to pivot one way or the other on his hind legs.

“... those liftings up and lettings down of the horse’s feet in just time and order... not so much moving forward...” (Corte, p. 54)

“... remembering in the end to stop him comely, with two or three pessate made well...” (Corte, p. 58)

**Piaffe** - A trot in place.

“... and make him do as most of the horses from Spain do, as one begins to hold them, go with their haunches to the ground. And while he is held, he should remain in motion, that is to say now with one, now with the other arm raised; also taking care that he chews the bridle so that it makes sound, because in doing so in addition to being beautiful to watch it will be safer, and no one will find fault with this.” (Fiaschi, 1556, trans. Tomassini)

**Repolone** - Moving in a straight line, usually at the canter.

**Volte** - A small circle. De La Broue’s second book is an excellent reference and shows voltes of different sizes, with the horse straight, haunches in, shoulder in, etc.

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