

## Domenico da Piacenza: a Brief Overview

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*“Dancing seemed like paradise and the dancers, from the orders of angels, each one filled with joy and laughter.”*

~ Domenico, c. 1450

Surviving dance sources from 15th century Italy were published by three men: Domenico da Piacenza and his students, Antonio Cornazano (who said Domenico was a “king of the art”), and Giovanni Ambrosio (who is also known as Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro).

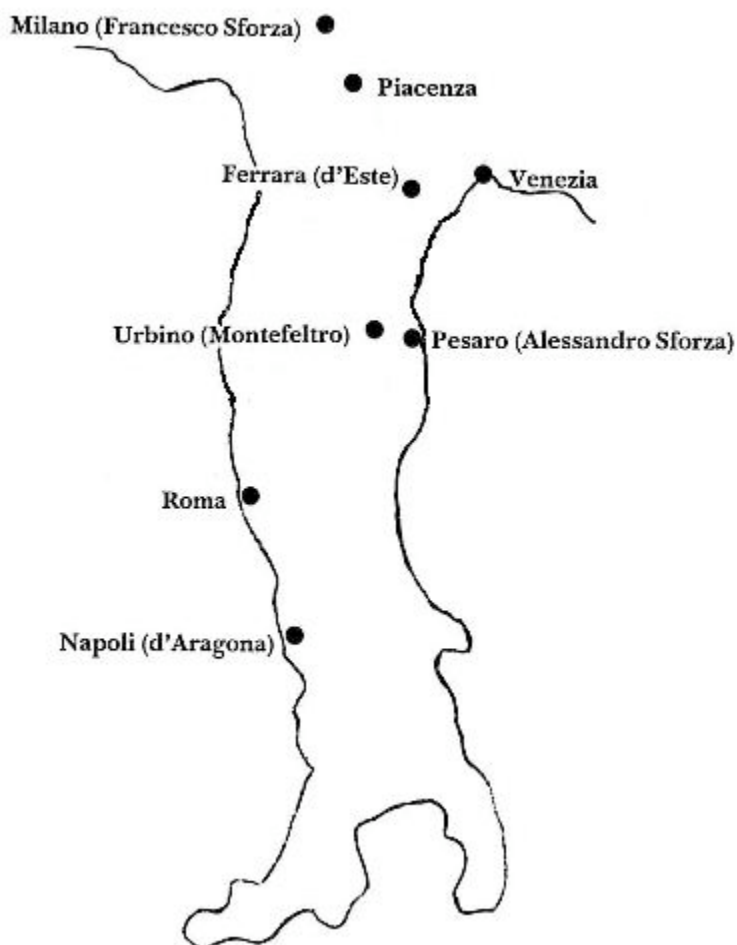
Domenico da Piacenza belonged to the chivalric Order of the Golden Spur, or Militia Aurata. He may have been a member of the Marquis of Ferrara’s household. He was knighted before 1463, possibly as early as 1452. It is likely that he was knighted during a ceremony of the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III.

In addition to being a knight, Domenico created dances for festivals attended by the Italian nobility, wedding celebrations, engagement ceremonies, and the like. His works were published after he was knighted (c. 1455-1465.)

Domenico was in Ferrara in 1439, 1441, 1445, and 1450.

In April of 1455 Domenico prepared the dances for the wedding of Tristano Sforza and Beatrice d’Este (the daughter of Niccolò III - marquis of Ferrara). The wedding took place in Milano or Ferrara.

In the autumn of 1455, Domenico created dances for the engagement of Ippolita Sforza to Alfonso d’Aragona. The negotiations of this marriage took place in Milano. The engagement was celebrated in the same location. Alfonso d’Aragona was the grandson of King Alfonso of Napoli, and the son of don Ferdinando and his wife Isabella, then the Duke and Duchess of Calabria - they would later become King and Queen of Napoli.



## Domenico's Elements of Dance

Domenico begins his instructions by dividing dance into several components.

- Measure/*Misura* - understanding the tempo of the music, and how your body should move in time to the music.
- Memory/*Memoria* - remembering the steps, the order of the steps, and the timing of the steps, as well as how they should fit to each piece of music.
- Agility/*Agilitade and Manner/Maniera* - I cannot explain any better than Domenico:  
“with smoothness, appear like a gondola that is propelled by two oars through waves when the sea is calm as it normally is. The said waves rise with slowness and fall with quickness.”
- *Misura di terreno* - Controlling and moderating the motion of your body as you dance. Essentially, maintain poise and a clear connection with the ground beneath your feet. The motion of your entire body should match the motion of the dance.
- Placing the body with *fantasmate* - a certain type of physical quickness  
“at each *tempo* one appears to.....be of stone in one instant, then, in another instant, take flight like a falcon driven by hunger.”

By combining these elements together, dance becomes a “refined demonstration of as much intellect and effort one can find”.

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## Bibliography

Domenico da Piacenze, Antonio Cornazano, Guglielmo Ebreo. various books & manuscripts, translated by A. William Smith in *Fifteenth-Century Dance And Music*, Pendragon Press, 1995. ISBN: 0-945193-25-4