

THE FIELD OF THE CLOTH OF GOLD c. 1545 Oil on canvas 168.9 x 347.3 cm
RCIN 405794 (Hampton Court Palace)

The recent exhibition at the King's Gallery (*Holbein at the Tudor Court*) has re-awaked interest in the painting of the diplomatic meeting that took place between Henry VIII and Francis 1 near Calais on 7 June 1520. In this there is much period detail that can be drawn out of the 'Partying'.



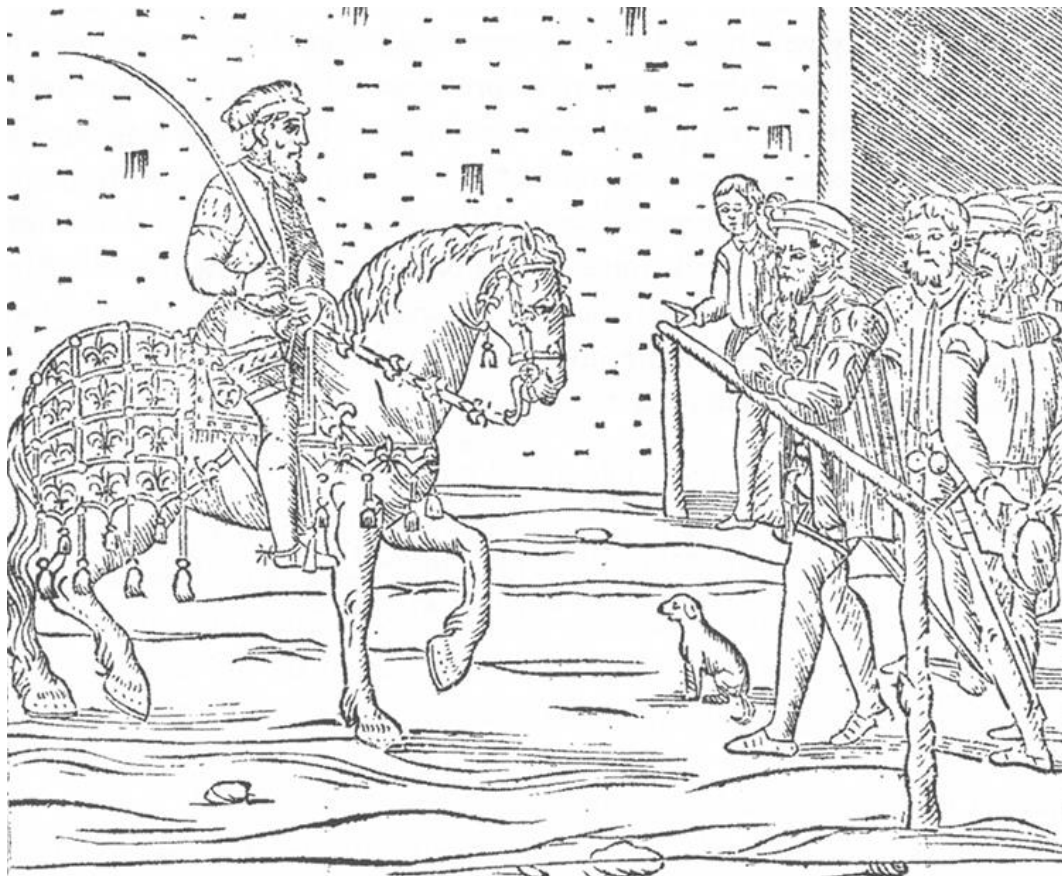
Detail of the Field of the Cloth of Gold 1545

However there is also interest in detail which shows the skill of the artist in the representation of Henry VIII himself. The interest in this detail lies in the horsemanship in which the pairing of the diagonals (near hind with off fore legs and off hind with near fore legs) show a movement known as a 'passage'. This is a

controlled slow forward movement which in its extremes resembles a trot on the spot or a 'piaffe'.

In art history terms it is clear that the artist appears as an accurate recorder by showing such matters as 'collection' of the forehand and the engagement of the 'croup' or hindquarters. In this Henry would have drawn the horse together like a spring which he could release as required through his hands which appear to hold the reins 'softly' and with tack.

It is said that Henry demonstrated his skill in horsemanship following the signing of the treaty in the Chapel Royal at Greenwich, 5 July 1517. This begs the question of where he obtained this skill in what was presumably 'haute école'.



The authority recording this practice was only published in 1550 as *Gli Ordini di Cavalcare* by Federico Grisone with a partial translation by Thomas Blundeville into English following in 1609.

Although Grisone had started a school of equitation in Naples in 1532 this appears to be too late for Henry Tudor unless passed to him by another source. However it seems more likely that he had access to *On Horsemanship* by Xenophon, possibly in Greek, which was published in 1516 in Venice by the Giunti press.

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