

Title	The re-invention of horsemanship in early modern Europe
Sub Title	近世ヨーロッパにおける馬術の再構築
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Publisher	慶應義塾大学日吉紀要刊行委員会
Publication year	2011
Jtitle	慶應義塾大学日吉紀要. 人文科学 (The Hiyoshi review of the humanities). No.26 (2011.), p.95- 113
JaLC DOI	
Abstract	
Notes	
Genre	Departmental Bulletin Paper
URL	https://koara.lib.keio.ac.jp/xoonips/modules/xoonips/detail.php?koara_id=AN10065043-20110531-0095

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The re-invention of horsemanship in early modern Europe

Tatsuya Mitsuda

In a recent article in the journal *Past & Present*, the eminent French cultural historian Daniel Roche called on fellow historians to take a more serious interest in the key role played by the horse in early modern Europe.⁽¹⁾ He pointed to how intellectual engagement with the animal can illuminate what was ‘different and specific to traditional societies’ and enthused that the ‘history of men and horses [can] help us to explore a particular vision of the world through its social practices, conflicts and representations.’⁽²⁾ As Roche is well aware, the horse was ubiquitous in the early modern age. From horses ridden by monarchs who used them to exert and extend their power over their populations, to street vendors who used them to ferry agricultural produce to and from towns, horses quite literally straddled vast areas of political, economic, social and cultural life in ways that no other animal could match. Viewed from this equine perspective, the early modern age is marked by the frequency with which the horse was used as symbols of power.⁽³⁾ That

(1) Daniel Roche, ‘Equestrian culture in France from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century’, *Past & Present* 199 (May 2008), 113–145. Two other eminent historians have done something similar: Reinhart Koselleck, ‘Das Ende des Pferdezeitalters’, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (25 September, 2003); F.M.L. Thompson, ‘Introduction’, *idem* (ed), *Horses in European economic history: a preliminary canter* (Reading, 1983).

(2) *Ibid.*, 113.

(3) Karen Raber and Treva J. Tucker (eds), *The culture of the horse: status, discipline, and identity in the early modern world* (New York, 2005).

equestrian monuments and paintings as well as the art of horsemanship all blossomed during this time hardly needs mentioning; nor are they coincidental phenomena.⁽⁴⁾ All these symbolically powerful cultural acts arguably strengthened the association of the ridden horse with status and power. In fact this is a connection that remains strong to this day.

Crucial in the augmentation of this association, this article argues, was the initiative to elevate the act of riding into the art of horsemanship. This was a totally new style of riding, which emerged between the late fifteenth and the early sixteenth century, first in Italy and then in France. Focusing closely on developments in France but also incorporating developments in England and, to a lesser extent, in Germany, this article illustrates why riding needed ‘re-invention’ and gauges how successful equestrian academies were in endorsing ‘the identity of socially dominant groups.’⁽⁵⁾

From knights to cavalrymen

By the sixteenth century, horsemen had become the butt of jokes, laughed at rather than revered. The former knights, so it was pointed out, had become degenerate, morally loose and lazy – ‘guzzling and hawking themselves’, in the memorable words of J.R. Hale, ‘to the very margins of social usefulness’.⁽⁶⁾ Without their saddles horsemen were, Erasmus chipped in, socially useless. He described them as fraudsters who would drink, debauch and gamble away their lives. In a

(4) Peter Burke, *The fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven and London, 1992).; Walter Liedtke, *The royal horse and rider: painting, sculpture, and horsemanship 1500-1800* (New York, 1989); Michel Martin, *Les Monuments équestres de Louis XIV: une grande entreprise de propagande monarchique* (Paris, 1986); Marie-Christine Mégret-Lacan, ‘Naissance de l’art équestre’, *Dix-septième siècle* 204/3 (July-September 1999).

(5) Roche, 114.

(6) J.R. Hale, ‘The military education of the officer class in early modern Europe’, in Cecil H. Clough (ed), *Cultural aspects of the Italian Renaissance. Essays in honour of Paul Oskar Kristeller* (Manchester and New York, 1976), 442.

dialogue between a wise old advisor and a youth who hoped to become a nobleman, the advisor notes sarcastically: ‘Unless you are an expert gamester at cards and dice, a rank whoremaster, a stout drinker, a daring extravagant, and understand the art of borrowing or bubbling, and have got French pox [syphilis] to boot, scarce anyone will believe you to be a knight.’⁽⁷⁾

Horsemen found themselves in this unhealthy state because they were struggling to adapt to two new circumstances – the first military and the second civil – which the early modern period had thrown up. By the beginning of the sixteenth century, firepower had entered the battlefield, affecting profoundly the position of the horseman within the military set-up. Previously, it had been common for the knights, or *gen d’armes*, to assume a central and independent position in the field of battle. Their heavy charge, on armoured horses, was designed to strike the decisive blow that would send foot soldiers scattering. Firepower, however, changed this military landscape. Now artillery and infantry, equipped with firepower, could now repel the advances of a heavy mounted attack, rendering the men-at-arms mere mascots on the field of combat.

Looking at the example of Henry II, who is considered the most medieval of French kings, one can appreciate how this turnaround was finally achieved. As a ruler, Henry II still set up tournaments and jousting for the heavily-armoured knights, who, with their principle weapon the lance, composed the heart of his royal army. But his heavy cavalry soon met its match when in October 1552 it encountered a force of *reiters*, or riders, led by the Duke Albrecht of Brandenburg. The Duke had recently taken the decision to reform his cavalry by doing away with short lances and replacing them with pistols. By doing so, the Duke’s force had transformed itself into light cavalry. Despite inaccuracies over long distances the pistols’ impact over closer ranges was devastating. One result of this was the decimation of the

(7) Colloquy, ‘The false knight’ in W.T.H. Jackson (ed), *Essential works of Erasmus* (New York, 1965).

French *gen d'armes* at Saint-Vincent.⁽⁸⁾ From such experiences, Henry II took the immediate decision of creating a large force of *reiters* and *pistoliers* in his cavalry arm. By August 1588 there were, according to one estimate, some 8,200 *reiters* as opposed to a mere 1,750 *gen d'armes*.⁽⁹⁾ Such moves were part of a wider transformation: in the mid 1540s, German *reiters* successfully came to adapt firearms to the saddle, a feat that led to the complete abandonment of the lance in favour of the pistol and, in emergency, swords.⁽¹⁰⁾

The demise of knights and the rise of cavalry, achieved in the mid sixteenth century, gave rise to a battlefield in which the horseman no longer ruled supreme. Battles had now turned into complex and messy affairs in which no arm was dominant: medieval pitch battles in open spaces had given way to sieges and skirmishes. No longer could individuals, able to demonstrate and act upon notions of bravery garnered on horseback, take the initiative. Rather, their importance diminished, autonomous knights were forced to turn themselves into disciplined cavalymen. This meant that free movement was curtailed in favour of regimented work along side other arms in tactical formations.⁽¹¹⁾ Closer integration into the forces also required a more sophisticated understanding of the art of war. The meant discarding the one-sided emphasis on physical and moral attributes, such as strength and courage, to an emphasis on intelligence. But to develop a better appreciation of tactics, which intelligence made possible, horsemen had to dismount, sit down with books and study military tactics.

(8) James B. Wood, *The King's army: warfare, soldiers, and society during the Wars of Religion in France* (Cambridge, 1996), 123.

(9) Frederic J. Baumgartner, 'The demise of the medieval knight in France', in Jerome Friedman (ed), *Regnum, religio et ratio. Essays presented to Robert M. Kingdom* (Missouri, 1984), 14.

(10) John Ellis, *Cavalry: the history of mounted warfare* (Newton Abbot, 1978), 80–1.

(11) Hans Delbrück, *Geschichte der Kriegskunst im Rahmen der politischen Geschichte* (7 vols., Berlin, 1920), IV, 137.

Crucially this was a move that went against the spirit of a proper warrior. As the irreverent Pietro Aretino, in a letter to a young nobleman, commented in 1549: 'I consider it of little importance or none that Your Excellency has set yourself to studying treatises and compendiums upon the art of war. A man of your talent and your valour should rather have some great captain for his instructor [...] You should study and consider things military in actual warfare and not in the classroom.'⁽¹²⁾ Despite such feelings, it had by now become patently obvious that it was no longer sufficient to be brave, to know how to ride, to use a lance and a sword: the cavalryman also had to have intelligence, so that he could adapt himself to the ever-changing circumstances of war. Noting the bewildering pace with which military strategies underwent change, Sir Roger Williams observed, in 1590, that 'every day new inventions, strategies of wars, change of weapons, munitions' had proliferated which demanded the attentive mind of the elite soldier. Towards the end of the sixteenth century, horsemen had to come to terms with the possibility that they could no longer indulge in the exclusive pursuit of horsemanship, which had been hitherto possible in tournaments, jousts and tutoring received from their masters within households. Now, they also needed to broaden their education to encompass a more intellectual training conducted not outside but inside; designed not so much to raise their physical prowess as deepen their military knowledge; and delivered to foster group cohesion rather than encourage individual feats of bravery.

The second new circumstance that horsemen had to deal with was in the civil realm; but similar to the military, intellect also played a role. This was so because it had become increasingly important for horsemen to acquire an education in order to retain influences in government. Horsemen were quite cynical about this state-of-affairs. As Davis Bitton has explained: 'The demand that only nobles be chosen as baillis and senechaux ... had been readily granted by the king; yet it had to be

(12) Quoted in Hale, 'Military education', 441.

repeated in 1560, 1576, 1588, and 1614. In 1615, over two hundred noblemen appeared before the chancellor to complain that the positions at court were still being sold and that the nobles were not being favoured.¹³ Embittered at this state of affairs in which commoners would buy up offices from the crown, take over noble estates and titles, and thus install themselves in the body politic, Pierre d'Origny charged that 'it is the sure sign of the fall and collapse of a Monarchy or Republic when charges, offices, and church dignities are distributed to people who do not deserve them or sold for money in public sale or auction.'¹⁴

But these calls of foul play often masked the reality which the nobility faced. For some time the nature of government was shifting towards a more complex and expanded form of ruling that inevitably extended the scope of the bureaucracy. Even in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, when they came under severe challenges from those who invested their time and effort in acquiring an education at colleges and universities for the purposes of professional and social advancement, horsemen commonly displayed hostility towards acquiring such basic skills as literacy and numeracy. Referring to the *roturier* or commoner, who was now making advances at the expense of the nobility, Florentin Thierriat de Lochepierre despaired at the blindness of horsemen to respond to the times when intellect was becoming all important. 'The calamity of the time and the ignorance that we affect', he cried, 'have brought us to the point of not being preferred to *roturiers* unless equal to them in merit. It is judged unreasonable that a gentleman destitute of knowledge and experience be preferred to an experienced and learned *roturier*'.¹⁵

Finding themselves stuck within the rising importance of merit, the nobles

(13) Davis Bitton, *The French nobility in crisis 1560-1640* (Stanford, 1969), 61

(14) Quoted in Ellery Schalk, *From valor to pedigree: ideas of nobility in France in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries* (New Jersey, 1986), 72.

(15) Quoted in Bitton, *The French nobility*, 450.

were particularly ill-equipped to meet the challenge. Especially for such positions as the magistracy, which had assumed an important role at a time when laws were becoming greater in number and more complicated in content, they possessed few qualifications. Nor did they have much stomach for acquiring a legal education either. As a long and arduous process where preliminary studies of French, Latin and Greek were followed by further studies in a university setting, the nobility had very little appetite. This is hardly unsurprising: horsemen, as men of action and honour, still retained the notion that found the study of letters to be abhorrent and that, in consequence, men of letters were very base too.⁽¹⁶⁾ In the words of Rivault, writing in 1596, the nobility ‘so despises the enrichment of the mind [that] nothing seems to it more vile and less estimable’.⁽¹⁷⁾

Re – inventing horsemanship

When Antoine de Pluvinel and Salomon de la Broue – the two pioneers of equestrian academies in France and then across Europe – came to write their respective treatises on horsemanship in the early seventeenth century, their concerns were that, as things stood, the nobility would not be able to survive if it were to continue to repulse the importance of education.⁽¹⁸⁾ Pluvinel thus proposed the establishment of five academies, funded by the state, in the large towns of Paris, Tours, Poitiers, Bordeaux and Lyons.⁽¹⁹⁾ Each of the schools would be directed by a superintendent or governor who would be chosen for three to four years among the

(16) Cf. Dewald, *The European nobility*, 35.

(17) Quoted in Bitton, *The French nobility*, 49.

(18) Antoine de Pluvinel, *L'Instruction du roy en l'exercice de monter à cheval* (Paris 1627); Salomon de la Broue, *Le Cavalerie français, contenant les préceptes principaux qu'il faut observer exactement pour bien dresser les Chevaux aux exercices de la carrière et de la campagne* (3 vols., Paris, 1602). The first work of Pluvinel was published posthumously.

(19) Conrads, *Ritterakademien*, 50–2.

most virtuous gentlemen and who would be paid some 12,000 *livres* annually for the task of educating young nobles from the age of 15 for a four-to-five year period.⁽²⁰⁾

Pressures to found institutions of learning for the nobility had been mounting for some time. Following the passing of the edict of Nantes in 1560, a basic educational structure came into being for those who could afford and pursue it. In hasty response, writers such as François de l'Alouëte (1577), Pierre d'Origny (1578) and Florentin Thierriat de Lochepierre (1606) all came to express the urgent need for the nobility to follow suit in acquiring an education.⁽²¹⁾ Only by doing so, they reasoned, could one solve the problem of aristocratic degeneration, dampen the mindset of anti-intellectualism and equip the nobility with the skills necessary for the challenge that the new nobility of the robe had thrown down. Some had already seen the writing on the wall and had decided to act on their own accord. Looking to re-new themselves through '*un accès à la culture livresque*', these forward-looking nobles entered their children into universities and colleges in a hurried attempt to cover lost ground.⁽²²⁾ But the problem with these institutions of learning, which had traditionally been home to the clergy and then the robe, was that they did not strictly belong to the nobility. Naturally, the nobility felt it had different requirements.

The proposal put forward by Pluvinel and Broue was attractive because it managed to satisfy that need to be distinct and separate. Learning to master the art of horsemanship was a sure way of distinguishing the traditional nobility from the

(20) Roger Chartier, *L'Éducation en France du XVI au XVIII siècle* (Paris, 1976), 170.

(21) François de l'Alouëte, *Traité des nobles et des vertus dont ils sont formés, leur charge, vocation, rang et degré, des marques, généalogies et diverses espèces d'iceux, de l'origine des fiefs et des armoiries...* (Paris, 1577); Pierre d'Origny, *Le Hérald de la noblesse de France* (Paris, 1578); Florentin Thierriat de Lochepierre, *Trois traictez, savoir: 1 De la noblesse de race. 2 De la noblesse civile. 3 Des immunités des ignobles* (Paris, 1606).

(22) Chartier, *L'Éducation en France* 169.

robe who would usually travel around in coaches and carriages to their places of learning. Before the opening of Pluvinel's equestrian academy in Paris a proposal sought to found a special academy for young nobles that was distinct from Jesuit colleges and universities. But this idea, advanced by Pierre d'Origny in 1578, never gained the kind of support Pluvinel's was to attain. Focusing unashamedly on two career trajectories to either the civil service or the military, the curriculum he envisaged arguably smacked too much of the kind of course offered elsewhere, to which supporters of 'driving' commonly flocked.²³ The unconcealed zeal for career advancement through the attainment of merit would have been unpalatable. In other words, it did not have the horse at the centre to set it apart from the rest.

The failure of Origny's plan does not mean, however, that the one pursued by Pluvinel was solely focused on the *manège* or riding exercises. Far from it: the Pluvinelian academies furnished not only competence in riding, but they also took a keen interest in, for example, fencing, dancing, gymnastics and musical performances. They also taught academic subjects, notably mathematics and languages, which involved just as much time off the saddle as on it.²⁴ 'Pluvinel not only instruct[s] the gentleman in the profession of riding,' as Alexandre de Pontaymery put it, 'but in the practice of good morals – without which all sciences are only vanity'.²⁵ Many of the equestrian academies also came to be strategically placed near to universities, so that the nobility who attended them could benefit from learning offered outside the confines of the *manège*.²⁶

(23) Cf. Bitton, *The French nobility*, 49. For another failed example, this time an earlier attempt by Francis I to establish a noble school for letters, see Motley, *Becoming a French aristocrat*, 124–5.

(24) Corinne Doucet, 'Les Académies équestres et l'éducation de la noblesse (XVIe – XVIIIe siècle)', *Revue historique* 308/4 (October 2003), 817–36, 829–30; Orden, 'From *Gens d'armes* to *Gentilshommes*', 198.

(25) Cited in Orden, 'From *Gens d'armes* to *Gentilshommes*', 198.

(26) Norbert Conrads, *Ritterakademien der frühen Neuzeit: Bildung als Standesprivileg im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1982), 70–1.

So much had the need to ‘intellectualise’ the outlook of the nobility permeated, in fact, that even in the hallowed area of horsemanship, concerted efforts were made to publish books and manuals that attempted to place horsemanship on a theoretical and scientific footing. All this had to be learnt away from the horse. The significance of this should not be underestimated. For a long time horsemanship had prided itself on individualised learning and direct on-the-saddle experience; but a different direction was now proposed. Mistakes in how one rode and how one performed jumps and airs, horsemen had now come to realise, could not be corrected by mere self-observation on horseback. ‘Grisone demands that the rider complements his education through the study of teaching that has been written’, Maria Platte has written with reference to Federico Grisone, the Italian master who taught Pluvinel. ‘Only by doing so’, she added, ‘can he acquire the necessary knowledge about weight and proportion.’⁽²⁷⁾

But even as equestrian academies sought to comply with the demand of the times, proponents refused to concede that consultation of books, which required the nurturing of the mind, automatically made good horsemen. As the writings of Broue and others make abundantly clear, horsemanship was an art that one had to pursue over a considerable length of time, if not over the course of a lifetime. Not for nothing did Pluvinel and Broue envisage a four-to-five year period of instruction in which the art was to be perfected, not through the perusal of manuals, but through instruction from a competent master. As such, the kind of education the nobility underwent was designed in such a complicated and profound way, involving the acquisition of so many different moves and postures, that attendance at one of the academies was unavoidable. As Denise Carabin has summarised, teaching consisted of a bewildering array of moves, which involved “airs”, the “coubette”, the jump, the “terre à terre”.⁽²⁸⁾ Another specialist in the study of the *haute-école*, Elizabeth

⁽²⁷⁾ Maria Platte, *Die «Manège royal» des Antoine de Pluvinel* (Wiesbaden, 2000), 31–

LeGuin, has described what some of this involved:

The ‘airs above ground’ include *caprioles*, *terre à terres*, *courbettes*, and *un pas et un saut* (‘a step and a jump’). The capriole is a motion in which the horse springs off the ground from a standstill, flinging out all four feet. Rhythmically speaking, it is a single beat, adaptable to any meter, although obviously it is a massive movement best suited to marking musical arrival points. The most beloved of the airs are also most rhythmically complex ... the *terre à terre* and the *courbette*, movement similar in all but degree of elevation. Menestrier describes the *courbette* as ‘a [hopping] movement like a crow, which has given the name Little Crow to this air’.²⁸

Only when these moves were acquired, and unity with the horse achieved, could the education be considered in any way complete. Of course, the nature of the education envisaged, which prided itself on how it could not be copied or self-taught, did have the added benefit of limiting it to those who attended the equestrian academies, thereby helping to control those who could profess excellence in, and knowledge of, horsemanship. But what was important was less the kind of people who came to receive instruction than the confirmation of the superiority of “action” over “learning” and “feeling” over “reading” within an otherwise increasingly bookish and intellectual age.

Crucially, horsemanship, to those who had experienced it, could not simply be

²⁸ Denise Carabin, ‘Deux institutions de gentilshommes sous Louis XIII: Le Gentilhomme de Pasquier et L’Instructions du Roy de Pluvinel’, *Dix-septième siècle* 218/1 (January-March 2003), 27–38, 31.

²⁹ Elizabeth LeGuin, ‘Man and horse in harmony’, in Karen Raber and Treva J. Tucker (eds), *The culture of the horse: status, discipline, and identity in the early modern world* (New York, 2005), 191.

expressed in words. As one teacher put it in the late seventeenth century: ‘there are some actions so full of grace that they are impossible to describe[...] a teacher whose knowledge is based only on writings and language [...] will exert himself in vain trying to teach something that is more a question of practice than abstract knowledge.’⁽³⁰⁾ Pushed further what this amounted to were the inestimable insights that could only be gained on horseback. ‘The virtue in action is of greater worth than the virtue in contemplation’, Broue emphasised, ‘and beautiful deeds are to be prized more than profound words.’⁽³¹⁾ In his *Maneige royale*, which took the form of a dialogue with a future king, Pluvinel elaborated on the difference between what one could learn sitting down and what one could learn mounted. Certainly, he did not negate the importance of pursuing intellectual activities. Even so, he could not help but underline how, if it could not be deemed superior, horse-riding differed from those activities. Questioned why exercise on the horse was important, Pluvinel replied:

Everything about the sciences as well as the arts conducted on a rational basis are learnt in a rested position without any kind of torture, disturbance or concern. Pupils are allowed to study, either with or without teachers; and when their master assigns them something, they do so without being troubled as to what those teachings should be. But the task of horse-riding should not be confused with this: a man cannot learn the art without mounting a horse. He is forced to cope with all the eccentricities that an irrational animal can throw at him; he must experience the perils of when the horse is in a rage; and he must put up with the desperation and the cowardice of these animals, contending with the effects of their actions.⁽³²⁾

(30) Quoted in Mark Motley, *Becoming a French aristocrat: the education of the court nobility 1580–1715* (New Jersey, 1990), 141.

(31) Cited in Platte, *Die «Maneige royale»*, 31.

Clearly, the attraction of the Pluvinel model of educating the nobility was that it managed, even while it absorbed the need for study, to hold on to its own sense of being different by subordinating the act of learning to the act of riding. What the equestrian academies managed to do was to re-invent themselves in an image that would not only be acceptable to society at large but also satisfactory to the nobility who could, through the horse, maintain their distinct sense of identity.⁽³²⁾

The state and horsemanship

Of course, not everybody welcomed what one might term a ‘re-branding exercise’. To the extent that criticism came from their own, the success or failure of the new art of horsemanship hinged on whether enough horsemen could be converted to the Pluvinelian cause. Those who maintained the traditional view of horsemanship as a predominately military exercise – with its connections to knights, battles, jousting and tournaments – had difficulty coming to terms with this new format. In England, for example, William Cavendish was the main force behind the introduction of the new art of horsemanship in his country. But the Duke of Newcastle, who had picked up the new art while in exile in Holland and France following the Civil War, found himself having to defend the legitimacy of the exercises, which included elaborate jumps, airs and kicks that seemed to have little relevance to actual horse-riding and warfare. ‘[A]ll things in the manège’, as one critic remarked to him, ‘is nothing but tricks and dancing, and gamballs, and of no

(32) Antoine de Pluvinel, *Manège royal, où l'on peut remarquer le défaut et la perfection du chevalier en tous les exercices de cet art digne des princes, fait et pratiqué en l'instruction du Roy* (Paris, 1623), 11.

(33) A similar conclusion is reached by Tucker who argued that the *haute-école* created ‘an identity that was better suited and more responsive to [the nobility’s] actual circumstances’: Treva J. Tucker, ‘Early modern French noble identity and the equestrian “airs above ground”’, in Karen Raber and Treva J. Tucker (eds), *The culture of the horse: status, discipline, and identity in the early modern world* (New York, 2005), 273–310, 275.

use.³⁴ Similarly, Thomas Bedingfield, writing in the late sixteenth-century, expressed the sentiment that: 'The principal use of horses is to travel by the way, and serve in the war: whatsoever your horse learneth more is rather for pomp or pleasure, than honour or use.'³⁵ Equally, Cardinal Richelieu had deep reservations about conferring state-support on the new art of horsemanship, because of his ingrained belief that the noble's place was first and foremost the military sphere. Consequently, he could see little reason in funding what must have seemed to him over-elaborate exercises that had little applicability on the field of combat.³⁶

All of these objections, however, missed the deeper point about the *haute-école*. For the aim of instituting the equestrian academies was to rid the nobility of its negative associations with the past. Repeated images of violent warriors only served to inhibit the nobility's chances of survival in an age where it struggled to adapt to changing military tactics and social challenges from below. As part of the effort to escape from the shackles of the medieval past, appearing 'elegant' on horseback went some way to correcting this stereotype. As George Vigarello pointed out, 'an erect posture ... served as a brake on violent and unmeasured movement' the attainment of which had a significance far beyond the four walls of the *manège*.³⁷ Easy on the eye and certainly entertaining to an audience that came to watch them, the jumps and airs were designed to impart not only an aesthetic appeal but also to advertise the view that the nobility had successfully changed from violent rabbles to civilised elites. As Ellery Schalk put it: 'By helping to educate and polish the nobles they would help their 'image', and, like birth and the duel, would serve better and more effectively a nobility that, as it lost its primary military function, was becoming more in need of a new and more up-to-date raison

³⁴ William Cavendish, *A new method and extraordinary invention to dress horses, and work them according to nature* (London, 1667), 6.

³⁵ Quoted in Hale, 'Military education', 450.

³⁶ Cf. Bitton, *The French nobility*, 61.

³⁷ Quoted in Motley, *Becoming a French aristocrat*, 140–1.

d'être'.⁽³⁸⁾ To the extent that the new art of horsemanship provided one, it was a success.

Equestrian academies were not runaway successes from the start. The model advocated by Pluvinel and Broue put forward the creation of four to five academies, which the king was to found. But this template struggled to garner support from the state. Such were the delays to implementation that Estienne Pasquier, writing between 1610 and 1612, wrote with frustration that the forefathers' calling had not been sufficiently heeded. In a letter to the governor of Metz, Pasquier threw in his penny's worth, proposing the establishment of an academy in the province.⁽³⁹⁾ Cardinal de la Rouchfoucauld went one step further by taking matters into his own hands. In 1618, he channelled funds away from a fund for crippled soldiers to institute a publicly-funded establishment for horsemanship. His plan unsurprisingly incurred the wrath of the counsel, parliament and, not least of all, the soldiers' syndicate. In the end, it was shelved.⁽⁴⁰⁾

State investment in academies came later rather than sooner. For it was only in 1636, over thirty years after Pluvinel's private academy had first opened its doors, that Cardinal Richelieu agreed to state backing and royal patronage in founding the *Académie royale* in Paris; but only some time after he had set up the *Académie française* in 1625. Even then, closer inspection reveals how the system of scholarship, which had been drawn up to support poorer aristocrats at the Royal Academy, was significantly watered down. In the original plan some 600 nobles had been set to benefit from the scheme; but eventually a mere 20 scholarships were underwritten.⁽⁴¹⁾ Given this ambivalence of the state to fund attempts to resurrect horsemanship, the academies were forced to lead a patchy existence, unable to

(38) Schalk, *From valor to pedigree*, 177.

(39) Conrads, *Ritterakademien*, 69–70.

(40) Motley, *Becoming a French aristocrat*, 131–2.

(41) *Ibid.*, 131.

attain financial stability throughout much of the seventeenth century. Often they had little choice but to operate as self-financing institutions. Yet the high maintenance costs – the purchase of land and buildings, the provision of teachers and stabling, and the acquirement of clothing and horses – made them prohibitive to impoverished aristocrats which helped diminish the impact of what had been initially intended.

To judge the performance of academies based on whether they were able to implement an original creed, however, would surely be wrong. Despite the evident hardship, the *haute-école* did successfully spread across France and then beyond it to the rest of Europe without much state support. Since the academies did not come under the central authority of the *grand écuyer* until 1680, official figures are hard to come by. Nonetheless, Mark Motley has managed to calculate that equestrian academies increased their number substantially between 1600 and 1680. In Paris alone there were 7 to 8 schools while in the provinces there were between 18 and 20 in this period.⁽⁴²⁾ To an extent the schools owed their existence to initiatives made in the middle to late sixteenth century. This was when Italian masters came over to France to found private schools of horsemanship. Nevers was founded in 1565; Lyons was established in 1581 and Toulouse over a decade later in 1598.⁽⁴³⁾ But, in the majority of cases, schools came to be established in the seventeenth century. Of the 16 examples of provincial academies in France, Charles-Alphonse Duplessis noted that 12 had been established in either the seventeenth or eighteenth century.⁽⁴⁴⁾ So desirable had the *haute-école* become as an institution by this time that it had begun to entice the robe nobility. For them enthusiasm came from a wish to enter a career in either the military or the court which had been areas previously off-limits. But their fear was that, being totally unversed in riding generally and in horsemanship

(42) Ibid., 127.

(43) Doucet, 'Les Académies équestres', 819–20.

(44) Charles-Alphonse Duplessis, *L'Équitation en France, ses écoles et ses maîtres depuis le XVI^e siècle jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris and Nancy, 1892), Chapter 3.

particularly, incompetence on horseback threatened to be a serious embarrassment at best and an impediment to social advancement at worst. In the case of one Norman legal family, the youngest son, Nicolas Goulas, was sent off to be enrolled in an academy on the advice of an uncle who believed his nephew would be 'mocked at court and in the army if he did not ride well'.⁽⁴⁵⁾

As another measure of their popularity one might note the number of foreigners who flocked to France to attend the academies. Functioning like present-day MBA institutions, the schools attracted young gentlemen from across Europe. At Angers, for example, Roger Chartier calculated that 640 foreign pupils attended between 1601 and 1635. Germans were most represented with 323 pupils, followed by the Dutch with 179 and the English and Scots with 86 young nobles.⁽⁴⁶⁾ More significant perhaps were the sorts of people who came to France. Once again the records kept at Angers offers an insight into just how many young gentlemen, who would later on attain prominence and power, came to the academies. George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, came in 1615; Frederick von Pappenheim in 1629; William Pitt visited in 1724, Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington, attended in 1786; while Count Buffon as well as the Duke of Newcastle also came.⁽⁴⁷⁾ By the seventeenth century, one can reasonably say, the practice of sending young nobles to equestrian academies, albeit for shorter stays than initially envisaged, had become common.⁽⁴⁸⁾

(45) Motley, *Becoming a French aristocrat*, 134.

(46) Chartier, *L'Education en France*, 182.

(47) Doucet, 'Les Académies équestres', 830–1.

(48) Due to limitations of space, only the French model, the most significant, has been considered here. For how the equestrian academies and the art of horsemanship spread to and developed in other European countries and contexts, see, for Germany, Conrads, *Ritterakademien*, 88–135. For England, see Sir Humphrey Gilbert, *Queene Elizabethes Achademy, a book of precedence, &c., with essays on Italian and German books of courtesy* (London, 1869), 12ff.; Hale, 'Military education', 442–3; William Harrison Woodward, *Studies in education during the age of the Renaissance 1400–1600* (Cambridge, 1906), 302–6; Giles Worsley, 'A courtly art: the history of 'haute école' in

Conclusion

By the middle of the seventeenth century, the art of horsemanship had been rejuvenated.⁽⁴⁹⁾ This revived format allowed the horseman to rise, once more, above the walking and driving classes who were, in Broue's words, nothing more than 'a motley crew of badly-formed, thoughtless and presumptuous men.' This was done by elevating himself 'through [his] beautiful and genteel actions the difference in [his] virtuous livelihood and high quality.'⁽⁵⁰⁾ Perched high on the saddle, the horseman assumed a central position, subjecting the brute creation to his will in a way that indicated authority to those below. But in order to 'reduce the horse to reason', in Pluvinel's phrase, a highly competent horseman had to 'work with the mind and memory of the horse in such a way so that it can be accustomed to executing with beauty and discipline the moves intended... [T]he rider senses the movements of the horse and will be able to at which point he would need to use his hand or his heel to cause it to move forward.'⁽⁵¹⁾ Consequently, nothing looked as 'glorious', in the estimation of William Cavendish, than 'to see so excellent a creature, with so much spirit, and strength, to be so obedient to his rider, as if

England', *Court historian* 6/1 (2001), 29–47. But it seems that, in the case of England, the art of horsemanship never really took off, despite the efforts of the Duke of Newcastle to do so, a point that needs further investigation. For a tentative undertaking to do this, see Donna Landry, 'Learning to ride in early modern Britain, or, the making of the English hunting seat', in Karen Raber and Treva J. Tucker (eds), *The culture of the horse: status, discipline, and identity in the early modern world* (New York, 2005), 329–50.

⁽⁴⁹⁾ For an important parallel development in which the medieval tournament was re-invented as equestrian ballets, see Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly, *Triumphall shews: tournaments at German-speaking courts in their European context 1560–1730* (Berlin, 1992); idem., 'The Equestrian ballet in seventeenth-century Europe – Origin, description, development', *German life & letters* 37 (1983–1984), 198–212; André Stegmann, 'Art équestre en France en 1600', in Philippe Ariès and Jean-Claude Margolin (eds), *Les Jeux à la Renaissance* (Paris, 1982).

⁽⁵⁰⁾ Broue, *Le Cavalerie français*, I, 4.

⁽⁵¹⁾ Carabin, 'Deux institutions de gentilshommes', 32, 31.

having no will but his, they had but one body and one mind.⁵²

But in doing so the horseman had to be subtle. He could not, for instance, order the horse through an iron fist. Particularly when the eyes of the public were on him, analysing his every move, this way of proceeding would have invited howls of derision. Rather, it was important that ‘the good horseman always maintains a good posture, a *gaieté au visage*’, so that an impression of gracefulness would surface. Not only was this important because the rider needed to please, but also because the doctrine of the new art of horsemanship believed movement directly reflected the rider’s inner soul. It ‘render[ed] visible his abilities and his interior virtues’ which, in turn, served as measurements for ascertaining his potential to rule and lead.⁵³ Crucially, in the case of a future king, the first demonstration of his equestrian abilities before a select audience was something that was closely watched. So there was genuine jubilation at the occasion of Louis XIV’s first lesson, which he passed with flying colours. For his riding competence was taken as a sign that he had been ‘born with the necessary dispositions to learn effortlessly everything that can serve as an ornament to a great monarch’, thus auguring well for his future position as ruler.⁵⁴ Indeed, the way in which he rode was considered the same as the way in which he ruled, the horse representing the common rabble which he needed to subject to his will. As Pasquier put it, the one who ‘knows how to place the horse under his reason is both destined and capable of being ruler.’⁵⁵ In such a way, the new art of horsemanship managed to link the act of riding with the act of ruling. In fact, without this renewed ideology, which justified the elevation of the horseman above all others, the emergence of equestrian portraits and equestrian statues would not have been possible.

⁵² Cavendish (1667), 13.

⁵³ Carabin, ‘Deux institutions de gentilshommes’, 37.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Motley, *Becoming a French aristocrat*, 143.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Carabin, ‘Deux institutions de gentilshommes’, 32.