

VISUAL AIDS: EQUESTRIAN ICONOGRAPHY AND THE TRAINING OF HORSE, RIDER AND READER

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In the visual landscape of the early modern period, images of men on horseback occur with great frequency. Art historians are well acquainted with such imagery, especially as it appears in scenes that serve to connote power and prestige – in illustrations of battles and processions, and in portraiture of individuals. The ubiquity and, in some instances, the unabashedly formulaic quality of this imagery, coupled with the extremely limited role in our present culture played by the horse (an animal with which most people today lack personal familiarity), have encouraged a likewise formulaic and limited understanding of this early modern visual construct.

My essay seeks in two ways to invigorate the general torpidity of current art historical interpretation. First, it considers instances of equestrian imagery not usually analysed by art historians. Instead of looking at portraits and images of battles and ceremonies, I turn to book illustrations accompanying printed manuals of horsemanship. Information pertaining to the training and riding of horses provides the main content of these books that have remained outside the purview of art historical discourse. Second, my essay bridges the hermeneutic divide between using imagery as visual evidence of historical phenomena and conditions on the one hand, and treating imagery as the product of artistic/artisanal and technical training on the other. Treating the manuals' illustrations both as visual evidence and as artistic product allows me to consider the function of these images in order to pursue two intertwined goals: one is to use the images to get at a more specific understanding of the physical and the metaphysical goals of early modern riding, and the other is to consider how the images' mobilization and innovation of equestrian iconography¹ serve to communicate specific ideals and to construct particular identities.

¹ I am using the term 'equestrian iconography' in this essay to refer to the visual tradition going back to antiquity that features a man mounted on horseback.

Like the rider who trains the horse to perform various movements through the application of physical cues, collectively known as “the aids,” the images position the reader through visual cues to understand and accept a complex register of information about the text, the subject and the projected ideal identities of rider, reader and artist. That these identities are negotiated literally and figuratively on horseback attests to the primary importance of the horse in early modern history and culture.

My study of this subject began with an initial confrontation with an image that I, as a trained historian of Renaissance art, found vaguely laughable. For a number of years now, I have been working with a tremendously rich collection of early modern German printed books dealing with the training, stabling and treatment of horses. The collection, located at the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel, Germany, includes a ponderous tome bearing the title: *Vollkommener ergänzter Pferd-Schatz [...] In Gestalt einer außführlichen [...] Theoria Und auff dieselbe gegründete Praxis verfasst [...] (The Completely Revised Treasury of Horses Conceived in the Form of Detailed Theory and of Theory-based Practice)*.² The author is nowhere named in the book itself. The name Johann Christian Pinter von der Au appears in the title of the book’s later editions but information about this person has yet to be discovered. It was in viewing this book’s title-page engraving that I first confronted my own assumptions and then learned to correct them.³

The title-page engraving [Fig. 1] depicts what appears to be a stone plinth positioned in a barrel-vaulted passageway. The vaults are framed by fluted pilasters supporting slender entablatures and coffered arches. At the far end of the passageway, at the left margin of the page, a distant landscape consisting of a fence, various kinds of vegetation and the sky is visible. Appearing to be chiselled on the surface of the plinth parallel to the picture plane are the book’s title, place of publication, publisher and imperial publishing privilege. Atop the plinth

² *Vollkommener ergänzter Pferd-Schatz [...] In Gestalt einer außführlichen [...] Theoria Und auff dieselbe gegründete Praxis verfasst [...] (Frankfurt am Main, Thomas Götze: 1664).*

³ I discuss the *Pferd-Schatz* and this image in Cuneo P.F., “Das Reiten als Kriegstechnik, als Sport und als Kunst: Die Körpertechniken des Reitens und gesellschaftliche Identität im frühneuzeitlichen Deutschland” and “Die Kultur des Reitens im frühneuzeitlichen Deutschland”, in Mallinkrodt R. (ed.), *Bewegtes Leben. Körpertechniken in der frühen Neuzeit* (Wiesbaden: 2008) 178–180, 336–338.



Fig. 1. Title-page engraving of Christoph Metzger and Johann Philipp Thelott, *Vollkommener ergänzter Pferd-Schatz* [...] (Frankfurt am Main, Thomas Götze: 1664).

is a mounted rider whose horse has elevated its front legs and balances its own weight and that of its rider on its hind legs. Inscriptions at the bottom left and right of the page identify the artists involved in producing this engraving. Typical for the manufacture of printed imagery, there are (at least) two people involved: one who is responsible for the design and composition, which is usually delivered in the form of a drawing, and another, who takes the drawing, transfers it on to the copper plate and engraves it. The plate is then printed, often by a third person. In the case of the *Pferdt-Schatz* title-page engraving, Christoph Metzger was responsible for the image's design and composition; his name appears at the bottom left of the engraving followed by the initials 'Inv.' for 'Inventor'. His colleague, Johann Philipp Thelott, named at the bottom right and designated as 'Sc.' for 'Sculptor', was responsible for the engraving process. These designations from the Latin are typical in the production of prints and both Metzger and Thelott were active as illustrators for the manufacture of books in Frankfurt. Both worked on numerous projects for Thomas Matthias Götze, whose Frankfurt publishing house also produced the *Pferdt-Schatz*.⁴

The compositional structure of Metzger and Thelott's engraving is noticeably unstable – the artists did not keep a tight rein on the orthogonals and instead allowed each of them to amble off in different directions, resulting in a somewhat disjointed spatial realm. In addition, although the horse and rider were supposed to appear monumental, they struck me as faintly ridiculous, perched improbably atop the stone plinth. Like the spatial realm, the figures of horse and rider seemed to bear the marks of artists whose ambitions out-paced their abilities. Faced with the technically difficult challenge of rendering the horse and rider directly *en face*, the artists would have required sure and confident mastery of foreshortening and perspective in order to meet that challenge successfully. But such mastery appeared to have eluded them. The horse's hind hooves point away from each other in opposite directions, as if it were performing a balletic plié, while the front hooves are parallel to each other and both point off to the left. The anatomical relationships between the rider's left hand and

⁴ For Christoph Metzger, *Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Künstler von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. H. Vollmer, vol. XXIII/XXIV (Leipzig: 1999) 446. For Johann Philipp Thelott, *Allgemeines Lexikon*, vol. XXXI/XXXIII 593.

arm, his left thigh and his torso and between the horse's body and its tail can only be described as mysterious. But what struck me the most was the expression of the horse's face. With what seems to be a comically exaggerated look of seriousness, the horse appears to be cogitating mightily upon some immensely difficult topic. Compared to other seventeenth-century equestrian figures such as those produced by Anthony van Dyck (1599–1641) and Diego Velázquez (c. 1636) [Fig. 2], Metzger and Thelott's horse and rider look technically maladroit.

Eventually I turned the page and moved on to the book's text. The *Pferdt-Schatz* really did live up to its name; it turned out to be a veritable treasure-trove of information about all kinds of assumptions, influences, notions and techniques. Reading the text was not only informative, however; it also made me change my mind about the engraved title-page illustration. Certainly, no one would ever win the argument that this image belongs to the category of great art. Measured against the twin ideals argued to be embodied in canonical early modern art, namely the ideals of artistic facility and descriptive verisimilitude, the engraving clearly falls short. However, regarded as a multilayered system of visual signifiers that evoke, introduce and recapitulate key concepts found in the text, the engraving is highly successful. Ontology is everything here. Regarded as something it never claimed to be, a work of art, the image fails miserably. Regarded according to the function it was meant to fulfill, as a title-page illustration, the image succeeds brilliantly.

The engraving's function and success become clear when specific passages of the text are carefully considered. Like most of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century German books on horsemanship, the *Pferdt-Schatz* insists on the venerable antiquity of horsemanship. A host of classical authors are corralled and cited for their praise of horses and of those who ride and care for them appropriately. These Greek and Roman authors include men such as Xenophon, Aristotle, Herodotus, Pliny, Plutarch, Varro and Vegetius. In addition, great heroes of antiquity – the usual suspects – who have conquered their enemies in mounted battle are trotted out before the reader; Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar make numerous appearances.

But the *Pferdt-Schatz* not only looks towards the distant past for legitimization and inspiration – it also draws from the recent past, especially from the earlier seventeenth-century work of Antoine de Pluvinel (b. 1552). Until his death in 1620, Pluvinel was the riding



Fig. 2. Diego Velázquez, *Equestrian Portrait of Don Gaspar de Guzmán, Count-Duke Olivares*, ca. 1635. Oil on canvas, 50¼ × 41in. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

master to the French King, Louis XIII (reigned 1610 to 1643), and he was also the author of a highly influential treatise on the art of riding. His text *Le Maneige Royal* was first printed posthumously in 1623 and its expanded second edition, *L'Instruction du Roy en l'exercise de monter a cheval*, appeared in 1625.⁵ The *Pferdt-Schatz* cites Pluvinel on a number of occasions, although one cannot in any way designate the German text as a copy of the French royal riding master's manual.

Both works, however, do share an emphasis on riding as a noble art, the adjective "noble" here referring specifically to social identity, not to some vaguely fine quality. Pluvinel's text is written as a dialogue between those who seek to perform horsemanship at its highest possible level, namely the king, his riding master and his noble courtiers.⁶ This purported dialogue is even the subject of one of the engravings that we find in the richly illustrated work of Pluvinel; the artist here is the engraver, Crispijn de Passe the Younger (1593–1670). Although the *Pferdt-Schatz* makes a point of discussing many different kinds of horses suited for many different kinds of work, the text clearly insists that the horse finds its supreme utility when employed by noble rulers ('der hohe Regierstand'):

It is redundantly clear that God made horses, especially in terms of their higher use and exercise, particularly beneficial and appurtenant to the most noble of rulers. This is because, in everything a horse is used for, there is not one thing that is not appropriate, commodious, essential, and serviceable to the rulers' ornamentation, elevation, propagation, facilitation, und protection.⁷

⁵ Platte M., *Die "Maneige Royal" des Antoine de Pluvinel*, Wolfenbütteler Forschungen 89 (Wiesbaden: 2000) 40–47, 51–53.

⁶ de Pluvinel Antoine, *Maneige royal où'on peut remarquer le defaut et la perfection du chevalier en tous les exercices de cet art [...]* (Paris, Guillaume LeNoir: 1624). For a fascimile of the 1626 edition of Pluvinel translated into English, see de Pluvinel, Antoine, *The Maneige Royal*, transl. H. Nelson (London: 1969).

⁷ All translation from the German into English are my own unless otherwise noted. *Pferdt-Schatz* Part I 143: "Worausß zum überfluß erscheinet/wie Gott die Pferde/mit ihren unterschiedenen/sonderlich aber hohen Gebrauch und übung/dem hohen Regierstand/forderst zum besten erschaffen/zugeeignet und geschencket: Weil in allem Gebrauch der Pferde und derselben unterschiedlichen Art/nichts ist/welches nicht eigentlich zur Zierde/Erhebung/Vermehrung/Erleichterung und Versicherung oder beständiger Erhaltung desselben angesehen/bequem/nötig und dienstlich wär [...]". For a similar emphasis on the nobility of ridings, see von Dehnen Rothfelser E.A., *Kurze doch eigentliche und gründliche Beschreibung von Abrichtung und Zäumung der Roße/Auch wie dieselbigen zu allerhand Schimpff und Ernst zu gebrauchen* (Dresden, Gmel Berg: 1637) 4: "kein edler Kleinod ist/als ein edles/gehorsames vermögens/wohl abgerichtetes Ross/darauff Land und Leute erhalten/erwerben

Another reason why riding is so particularly appropriate to the nobility, the *Pferdt-Schatz* implies, is that it is so difficult; and here riding is meant as performance, as opposed to simply a method of transportation. To ride a horse correctly demands a tremendous amount of theoretical knowledge, physical skill (acquired by correct instruction and endless practice), emotional equilibrium and even moral rectitude. The dual emphasis on both practice and theory is already evident in the book's full title. At the beginning of the second main part of the text, riding is discussed as an activity that not only engages the body and the senses but also the mind and the intellect. The text asserts that riding should be considered on a par with the liberal arts taught at the universities by famous professors, because riding too must be grounded in fundamental theory.⁸ In fact, an earlier German text, published in 1637, argues that it is actually easier to obtain a doctoral degree at a university than it is to train a horse successfully because a student requires fewer skill-sets than a rider does.⁹

In riding the horse, all of that theoretical knowledge – about the physical and emotional nature of individual horses and about the correct implementation of a vast array of methods and equipment used to train and maintain them – must be physically activated. To do this requires a high degree of bodily competence and control. We get a glimpse of how demanding this is when we consider the section in the *Pferdt-Schatz* that describes in excruciating detail how the rider is to position each part of his body, from his toes to his eyeballs and everything in between, no matter what the c. 1200 lb. horse is doing

ritterlichen Thaten/Erhöhung seines Standes/Lob/Ehr/Rhum/Hab/Gutt erhalten werden” (there is no greater treasure than a noble, obedient, well-trained horse upon which territory and folk are maintained, knightly deeds are accomplished, elevation of social rank is achieved and praise, honor, fame, worth and possessions are preserved).

⁸ *Pferdt-Schatz*, Part II 1–2.

⁹ von Dehnen Rothfelser, *Abrichtung und Zäumung* 99–100: “Ist es denn auch schwer ein Ross abzurichten? Wann einer nicht recht darzu naturet und gleich von Gott darzu geschaffen von Leib und Gemueth/so wird er schwerlich also beschaffen werden/einen grossen Herren darvor zu dienen/und profession darvon zumachen/und solte einer eher studieren/und Doctorem promovieren koenne/denn er nicht so viel Eigenschafften haben muss [...]” (So is it difficult to train a horse? If one does not have the right nature for it, and one's physical and emotional constitution were not as it were created by God for this purpose, one would hardly be suited to thus serve a powerful master and to make it [i.e. training horses] his profession. In this case it would be better for him to study and obtain his doctorate because [for this endeavor] he won't need as many qualities [as a professional horse trainer]).

underneath him.¹⁰ In describing this position, the text repeatedly admonishes the rider assiduously to avoid all extremes. For example, the rider's shoulders should be carried neither too high nor too low, the legs and elbows should be held neither too far back nor too far forward, the calves and the feet should not angled in or out, the toes should not be raised too high or the heels dropped too low, the torso should incline neither forwards nor backwards. The rider is repeatedly reminded always to seek 'das rechte Mittel'. While what is ostensibly described in this passage coincides to a large extent with what is still considered today as the optimal dressage seat,¹¹ the carefully crafted rhetoric and particular vocabulary indicate that there may be other things at play here. I believe we may be hearing the echoes of the structure and vocabulary of Aristotle's concept of the golden mean from his *Nicomachean Ethics*, written in the fourth century BCE, already translated from the Greek into Latin by the thirteenth century and subsequently tremendously influential on manifold aspects of early modern thought.¹² As the rider learns to balance his body in the saddle between kinetic extremes, no matter what the horse is dishing out, so he should learn to balance his desires and actions in life between emotional and physical extremes, regardless of the conditions he is facing.

Since Aristotle, the difficult achievement of balance between extremes was a matter of virtue. The ethos of early modern European nobility, formulated in texts belonging to the *Mirror of Princes* genre and in contemporaneous tracts discussing the history and character of the nobility, in fact demanded that a nobleman demonstrate virtue in every aspect of his life.¹³ Virtue provided an ethical legitimization of noble status and could be displayed and demonstrated in a number of ways, including the spiritual, the intellectual and the physical. Although constitutive elements of noble identity and thus of virtue were in a state of flux during the later part of the sixteenth- and in the seventeenth century, some traditional definitions of noble virtue remained in currency. For the lower nobility, these included loyalty to and support of the prince. One important way to demonstrate this

¹⁰ *Pferdt-Schatz*, Part II 3–29.

¹¹ See for example Zettl W., *Dressage in Harmony* (Boonsboro, MD.: 1998) 48–51.

¹² See the discussion of the golden mean in Aristotle, "Nicomachean Ethics", in Mckeon R. (ed.), *Introduction to Aristotle* (New York: 1947) 331–347.

¹³ Knall-Brskovsky U., "Ethos und Bildwelt des Adels", in *Adel im Wandel. Politik, Kultur, Konfession 1500–1700* (Horn: 1990) 480–497.

loyalty and support was on the back of a horse, whether as a commander of the prince's armed forces or as a performer in court ceremonies and spectacles.¹⁴

In addition to finding balance and to facilitate appropriate and thus virtuous service to the prince, a nobleman could learn many important things from interacting with his horse in the *manège*. For example, he would learn to distinguish duplicity from honesty and disingenuous servility from genuine service. In his book, *Von der Gestütere* (Frankfurt, 1584), Marx Fugger cites the hellenistic philosopher, Carneades, in maintaining that it was especially urgent for the sons of princes to learn to ride.¹⁵ As opposed to human tutors, who might flatter their noble charges in order to ingratiate themselves, the horse would provide utterly honest feedback. No matter how exalted the rider's rank and title, the horse would appropriately reward him for his mistakes by tossing his royal person in the dirt.

There were other highly valuable things to learn as well. According to the *Pferd-Schatz*, learning to ride provided a concomitant education in leadership skills.¹⁶ In interacting with his horse, a young nobleman learned to distinguish and recognize the distinct natures of the dominator and the dominated. He learned to exercise his authority over subordinates and he practiced feats of courage as well as methods of punishment and reward. These were exactly the skills he would need in his future role as leader of a noble household, an army, a territory or an empire.

Furthermore, the *Pferd-Schatz* text explains, learning to ride also provided the young nobleman with the opportunity to develop and exercise morality.¹⁷ True leadership, in good government as in skilled riding, is never a question of authority imposed by brute force. Instead, what is called for is skill and judgment in creating a willing acceptance

¹⁴ For both the belligerent and the ceremonial aspects of mounted service that respond to changing technologies and strategies of both warfare and representation, see Watanabe-O'Kelly H., *Triumphant Shews. Tournaments at German-speaking Courts in their European Context 1560–1730* (Berlin: 1992) and Schmidt G., "Voraussetzung oder Legitimation? Kriegsdienst und Adel im Dreißigjährigen Krieg", in Oexle O.G. – Paravicini W., *Nobilitas. Funktion und Repräsentation des Adels in Alteuropa* (Göttingen: 1997) 431–451.

¹⁵ Marx Fugger (1527–1597), humanist, hippologist, and head of the Fugger firm in Augsburg. Carneades of Cyrene (214/213–129/128 B.C.E.). Fugger Marx, *Von der Gestütere* (Frankfurt a. M., Martin Lechler for Sigmund Feyrabend: 1584) fols. 23r–24v.

¹⁶ *Pferd-Schatz*, Part I 144.

¹⁷ *Pferd-Schatz*, Part I 144.

on the part of the dominated for their role in the unequal balance of power. For this, the young nobleman had to learn not only how to punish and reward but when to do so and in what measure. He was also to learn that these actions must never be dictated by his emotions (such as impatience, anger, frustration) but must proceed instead from sound judgement, deep knowledge and far-sighted wisdom. It was also the moral obligation of those in leadership roles to protect and defend their charges and to create conditions in which those charges would flourish in safety, health and prosperity. Chosen by God to lead, it was their moral responsibility to deal considerately with other members of God's creation, be those other members equine or human subjects, by treating them with kindness, fairness and mercy. This emphasis on the appropriate and measured control of potentially unruly and violent elements echoes the classical trope in which the human bridling the horse demonstrates rational and virtuous command of the passions which in classical philosophy must never be allowed to rule humankind.

The *Pferdt-Schatz* makes clear that the rider must indeed balance both his body and his emotions. Interestingly, and uniquely to this text, the aspect of emotional equilibrium is not primarily discussed in terms of the correctness of riding, although this is clearly implied. Emotional balance is instead discussed according to the morality of riding and to the piety of the rider. In this section, the text explains that the horse was one of God's favourite creatures because study of the Bible reveals that God repeatedly chose the horse in particular both to serve and to glorify Him. That mankind was given the horse to use in exactly the same way (to serve and to glorify) constituted a tremendous gift from God.¹⁸ All the more important, therefore, was the responsibility of man to act as the wise and virtuous steward over such a gift.¹⁹ All the more damning, therefore, in the eyes of God, the text continues, was any kind of abuse of these magnificent creatures. To beat, whip or spur a horse out of anger, for example, was a sign of arrogance and pride; it was cruelty born out of a total lack of mercy, all of which constituted the most serious sins man could commit against his heavenly Father.²⁰ By contrast, to ride a horse as the *Pferdt-Schatz*

¹⁸ *Pferdt-Schatz* Part I 146–147.

¹⁹ *Pferdt-Schatz* Part I 3.

²⁰ *Pferdt-Schatz* Part I 140.

strives to instruct, whereby the rider treats the horse fairly, kindly and gently and works for the good of the animal, are the actions of a man living in accordance with God's will.

The ultimate demonstration of all of these abilities and qualities – the physical skill, the theoretical knowledge, the emotional equilibrium with its attendant moral rectitude – was the horse and rider's performance of the particularly difficult movements constituting the so-called "Hohe Schule" or High School of riding. These movements, which are illustrated and explicated in the *Pferdt-Schatz*, all involve the horse leaping off the ground in various modes of self-propulsion. Not all horses were suited for this rigorous physical display, but a horse that could manage these moves was living proof not only of its own strength and intelligence but also of its rider's talent and skill. The basic position, from which all of these leaps develop in the course of their execution, is the levade. In this position, the horse shifts its weight back onto its hindquarters, balancing itself – and its rider – on lowered hocks while the forelegs are suspended above the ground. In order to assume and then hold this position, the horse must possess a tremendous amount of strength in its hindquarters, back and abdomen, a keen sense of balance and a steady and tractable nature. In short, the horse exhibits the same desirable traits as the rider: strength, skill, understanding and balance.

Viewed within the context of this information provided by the text, Metzger and Thelott's title-page illustration makes much more sense. The classicizing architectural elements – the coffered archways and barrel vault, the entablature ornamented with dentils and the fluted pilasters – can be understood as a reference to the venerable antiquity of the art of riding. Even the stone plinth with its crumbling edges and chiselled inscription calls to mind ancient monuments that have managed to exist into the present. This classicizing and monumental architectural backdrop, even if it is not altogether spatially convincing, also serves subtly to remind the reader of Pluvinel; Crispijn de Passe's engraved illustrations to the French riding master's text often frame the equestrian action within or in front of a splendid, often classicized architectural setting [Fig. 3].

In fact, Metzger and Thelott have been rather specific in their reference to Pluvinel. Interestingly, their figures of the horse and rider, who together perform a levade, are not taken from the illustration of Pluvinel that describes the same movement, although this might seem to

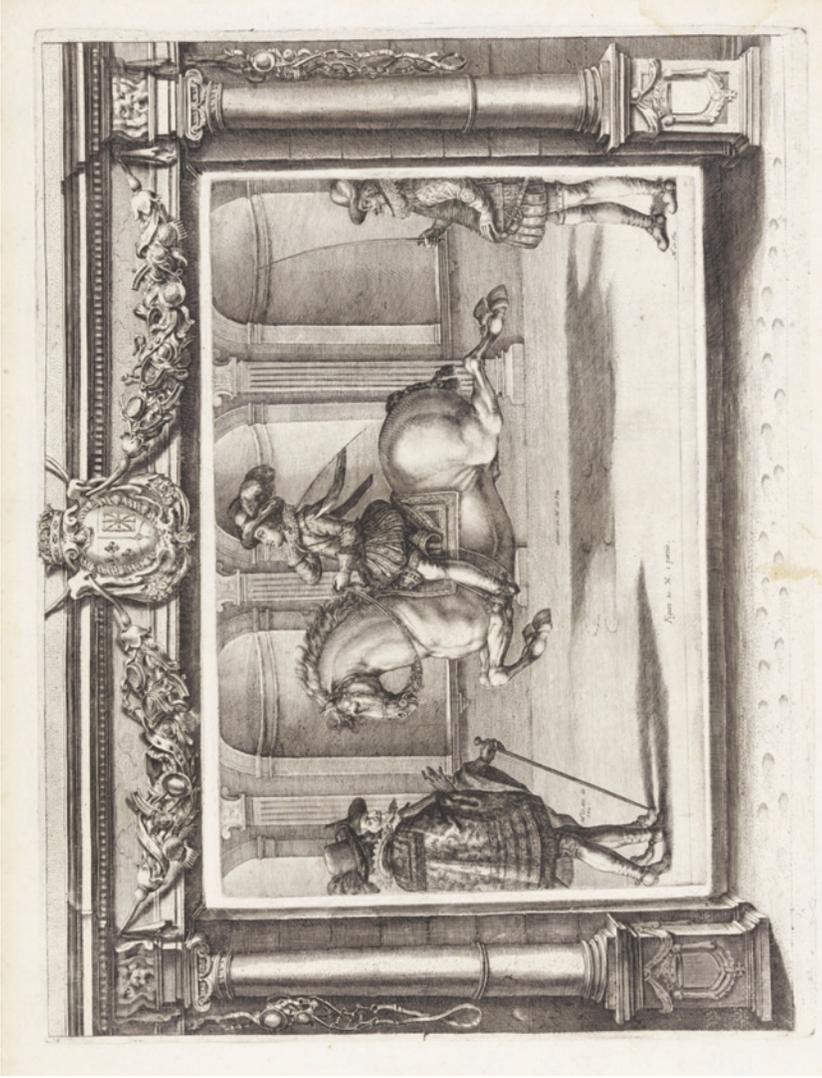


Fig. 3. Crispin de Passe, Illustration to Antoine de Pluvinel, *Manege royal ou l'on peut remarquer le défaut et la perfection du chevalier en tous les exercices de cet art* [...] (Paris, Guillaume LeNoir: 1624), part I, fig. 21.

have been the logical thing to do. Instead, Metzger and Thelott turned to figure 12 of *Le Maniege Royal*, featuring the Count of Soissons teaching his horse to perform a courbette from the levade [Fig. 4]. Crispijn de Passe's engraving clearly informs the *Pferdt-Schatz* title illustration; the pose of both horses and riders is almost identical. Yet Metzger and Thelott have given the figures of horse and rider a monumentality that de Passe's do not achieve by plucking them out of de Passe's overly crowded scene of insouciant courtiers, placing them directly in the middle of the composition and elevating them atop the stone plinth. In addition, Metzger and Thelott have managed to infuse their figures with an enlivening sense of drama; their horse's mane blows more noticeably and vigorously to the right than de Passe's; their rider's cape and horse's tail billow energetically out to the left, while the tail of de Passe's horse and the clothing of his rider politely obey the laws of gravity and remain where you would expect to find them. In addition, Metzger and Thelott's horse and rider both direct their gazes upwards, as if harkening to some higher calling, while the count and his rather shifty-eyed horse simply glance off to the left. The more intense contrast between light and dark in the German engraving also serves to augment the scene's sense of drama. This noticeable interest in visual drama, perhaps as well as a desire not to slavishly imitate Pluvinel/de Passe may explain why Metzger and Thelott rejected de Passe's illustration of the levade, featured in static and perfect profile, and instead chose as their model the illustration of the courbette, rendered from a more striking perspective.

In other words, Metzger and Thelott have borrowed de Passe's figures without stealing them outright. Through making enough subtle changes here and there, Metzger and Thelott have dodged the charge of visual piracy and yet, for those who would have been familiar with Pluvinel and who paid careful heed to the illustrations, the resonance between the two images would have been utterly discernible. And maybe that was even the point. Far from trying to disguise their borrowing, the artists allowed the connection to resonate because, like the reference to antiquity, the reference to Pluvinel aided in establishing a certain lineage and legitimacy for the content of the *Pferdt-Schatz*.

Because Metzger and Thelott's image of the horse and rider together performing the levade made for such a dramatic, lively and dynamic moment, it functioned especially well as an attractive title-page illustration, serving to entice potential buyers and readers of the book. The image also signalled an important section of the book's content,

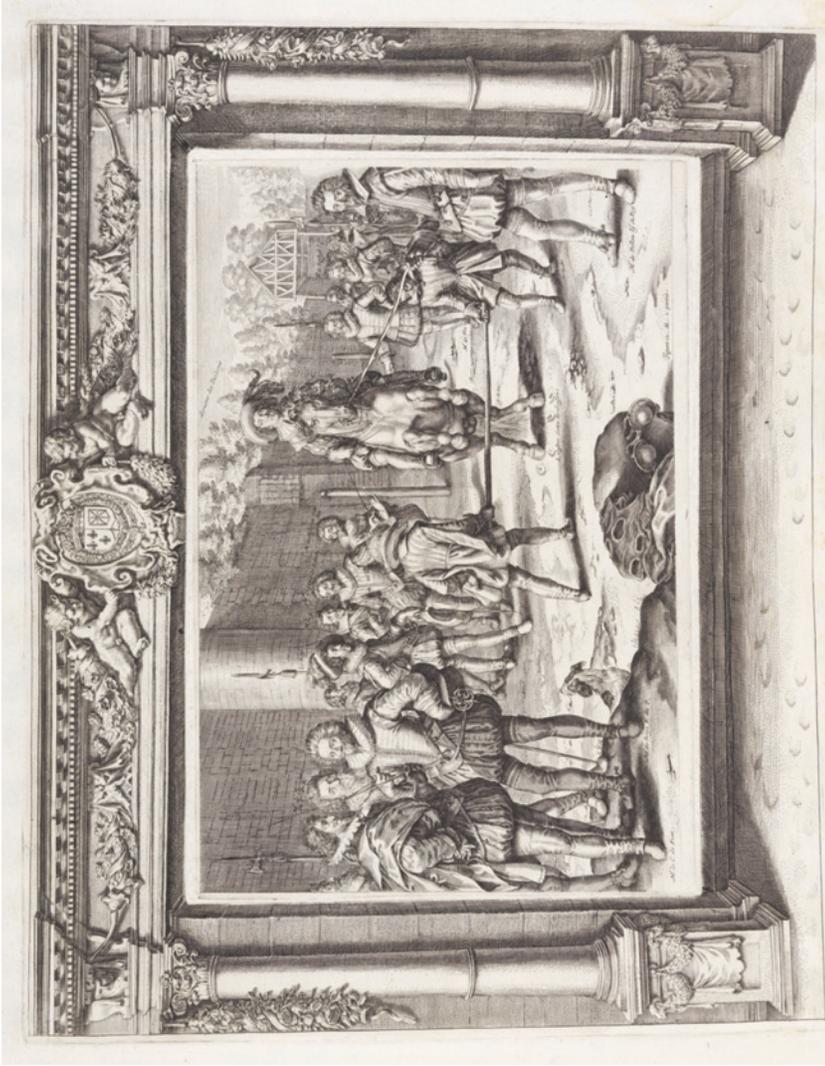


Fig. 4. Crispijn de Passe, etching/engraving illustration to Antoine de Pluvinel, *Manège royal où l'on peut remarquer le défaut et la perfection du chevalier en tous les exercices de cet art [...]* (Paris, Guillaume LeNoir: 1624), part I, fig. 12.

namely, a discussion of how to perform these highly difficult movements of the “Hohe Schule” based, as they are, on the correct execution of the levade. For example, the *Pferd-Schatz*, like Pluvinel, discusses and illustrates the courbette [Figs. 4 and 5]. The French aren’t the only ones who can hop around on their horses; the Germans can too, and the rider of the *Pferd-Schatz* illustration can do it even without the aid of the whip and one arm held casually akimbo. What *sprezzatura*! In the title-page illustration, the emotionless visage of the rider and the thoughtful expression of the horse, as they attain this breathtaking moment of reciprocal balance based on mutual trust and understanding, convey the text’s emphasis on the rider’s emotional equilibrium and his God-given responsibility to treat his horse fairly and kindly.

I have been arguing that Metzger and Thelott’s title-page engraving is far more than just a simple illustration. Instead, I see the references to classical antiquity and to Pluvinel, and the pose and expression of horse and rider that are constructed and combined in the image, functioning as a system of “visual aids;” they provide the reader with important cues about what he will find in the book if he hasn’t already read it, and about what he found in the book if he already has. In addition, a further function of the image’s visual elements, including its implementation of equestrian iconography, is to provide visual cues in aid of the fashioning of ideal identities, namely of the rider, the reader and the artist.

The identity of the rider is perhaps the most straightforward to articulate. Someone, who has bought the book because he is interested in honing or advancing his riding skills, would surely be encouraged to take the title-page horseman as a model. Without a frown or a drop of sweat, simply by a gentle tap with the whip, this superior rider enables his powerful yet cooperative mount to perform at the highest level, thus manifesting the epitome of horsemanship. Even if his own horsemanship were not up to that level, this reader/rider could fantasize about attaining such skill or he could pretend that he already had. Perhaps this rider/reader also enjoyed recognizing the visual references to Pluvinel, whose volume might have also graced his shelves.

But I wonder whether there weren’t other kinds of readers involved here, readers who might have bought the book without necessarily the intention to hurry out past the stable block and into the *manège* to try out the techniques they would have just read about. Perhaps they didn’t even have access to a *manège* ring much less own one. Perhaps



Fig. 5. Illustration to Christoph Metzger and Johann Philipp Thelott, *Vollkommener ergänzter Pferd-Schatz* [...] (Frankfurt am Main, Thomas Götze: 1664), illustration 18.

they bought the book because they enjoyed the illustrations. In terms of their implementation of equestrian iconography, these engraved illustrations were similar to paintings, manuscript illuminations, tapestries and statues, but even within the bindings of this voluminous book would have been more affordable than these much more costly media. These illustrations would have provided this reader with visual entertainment, a sense of owning “art,” and also a clearer understanding of what he saw other riders doing that would enable him to comment on and discuss those actions with others. Here the function would be more like an enthusiast reading the sports page and memorizing sports statistics but without necessarily spending actual time on the baseball diamond or the soccer pitch because talk about sport constitutes such a fundamental component of gender- and (in this case) class-specific discourse. The title-page illustration could offer this reader, who perhaps was not even a member of the nobility, strictly speaking, nonetheless the trappings of that life-style, complete with grand architecture, magnificent horse, equestrian skill and a detailed image that replicated more expensive media illustrating all of the above. He too could fantasize about being that mounted man, since equestrian iconography, going back to antiquity, sent a clear, unmistakable signal about the wealth, power and prestige of a man on horseback. If he were educated, this reader could feel affirmed in his knowledge by recognizing the classical elements not only of the roots of that iconography, but also of the depicted architecture and by reading about what familiar ancient authors wrote about horsemanship. This information he could use as well in his conversation with others like him.

Here it must be stated that getting at the actual readership of the *Pferdt-Schatz* and of other horsemanship manuals is challenging because relevant information about price and edition size is not easily accessible. Nonetheless, there are a number of clues that allow for informed speculation about the kinds of readers and owners. First of all, a certain kind of evidence is furnished by the books themselves and this evidence points primarily to educated, affluent audiences including members of the nobility. We have already noted the stated emphasis in the *Pferdt-Schatz* on riding as especially appropriate for the nobility. Dedicated to a member of the nobility, Anton Günther, Count of Oldenburg and Delmenhorst, who was himself a passionate breeder of horses, the *Pferdt-Schatz* is over 400 pages in length

and richly illustrated.²¹ The text is dense with Biblical and classical quotations and citations. Another horsemanship manual that I will discuss below, Georg Simon Winter's *Wolberittener Cavallier* (*The Well-Mounted Gentleman*, Nuremberg: 1678) is somewhat shorter – 191 pages and 115 engravings/etchings – but here too the emphasis points at least to a court milieu. As stated on its title-page, the objective of Winter's book is to provide information for use in instructing a young 'Cavallier' in the 'adelichen Exercitien zu Roß' (noble equestrian exercises). In this case, the reader/owner would include the court riding master as well as potentially his pupils.

Despite the books' marked emphasis on the nobility, there are indications that the culture of horses, which would include – to varying degrees – owning books on horsemanship and making conversation about the breeding, training and riding of horses, extended beyond the nobility and down into somewhat lower social groups. The *Pferdt-Schatz* discusses in detail how there are many different types of – and many different uses for – horses, for many different kinds of people, ranging from the nobility through every rank of society down to the humble ploughman and carter.²² Winter, a commoner, offers no specific information about the social status of the court riding masters, who would logically be the primary audience for his text.²³ In his *Von der Gestütere*y (Frankfurt: 1584), Marx Fugger (whose branch of the family was granted hereditary nobility only several decades earlier in the sixteenth century) insists that the acquisition, breeding and training of quality horses is an extremely expensive and time-consuming matter, yet he explicitly addresses his remarks exclusively to a socially unspecified audience of 'gutte Gesellen' (good fellows), who all share a love for horses and an interest in horsemanship. Furthermore, he mentions that even if someone is unable to ride his own horse at a

²¹ For Anton Günther, Count of Oldenburg and Delmenhorst (1583–1667) see Lübbling H., "Anton Günther, Graf von Oldenburg", in *Neue Deutsche Biographie* I (Berlin: 1953) 317.

²² The discussion of the more humble use of the horse is found in section 5 of the first part titled "Der Pferde gemein Gebrauch und Notturfft/worin sie allerley Ständen dienstlich", *Pferdt-Schatz* Part I 131–140.

²³ See note 29.

skillful level, he should still be able to enjoy watching someone else who can.²⁴

Thus, the readers/riders addressed by these books, and those who actually owned and/or read them or other books like them, might well have belonged to a range of social groups that included people who in fact did not hold noble rank. Although their social status might in reality have differed, these readers would be united in their common embrace of the (in some cases actually and/or physically unattainable) ideal identity as consummate horseman and refined gentleman.

Finally the title-page illustration also offers the ideal identity of the artist. And here we have come full circle back to the engraving and its producers. It is both naïve and short-sighted to dismiss Metzger and Thelott's image, as I initially did, either merely as decoration or as bad art. Their image actually offers plentiful evidence of ambitious illustrators who were also capable to a certain degree. Not only does the image capture and weave together so many key concepts of the text, it also combines the most important elements reproduced in two-dimensional media: landscape, architecture, the figure and technically challenging passages of foreshortening. And here I would like to emphasize especially the figure of the horse as a powerful signifier of artistic identity. We have seen that, in the case of the title-page horse in particular, Metzger and Thelott derived the figure from Crispijn de Passe. But we know that already in the sixteenth century certain artists wrote, illustrated and had published booklets that sought to teach all manner of other artists and artisans how to fashion the figure of a horse in different poses and from different vantage points.²⁵ The existence of these books, coupled with the numerous equestrian themes featured in early modern visual imagery, indicate how professionally vital was an artist's command of the equine figure. As evidenced from these demonstration booklets, however, training in equine iconography often involved a formulaic – rather than a fundamental – grasp of

²⁴ Fugger, *Von der Gestütterey* fols. 19r–v, 23v.

²⁵ Artists' manuals that deal (also) with the equine figure are: Sebald Beham, *Dises buchlein zeyget an und lernet ein maß oder proporcion der Ross* [...] (Nuremberg: 1528); Erhard Schön, *Underweisung der Proportion und stellung der bossen* [...] (Nuremberg, Christoff Zell: 1542); and Heinrich Lautensack, *Des Circkels unnd Richtscheyts/ auch der Perspectiva und Proportion der Menschen und Rosse* [...] *underweisung* [...] (Frankfurt a. M., Sigmund Feyerabend: 1563). See Cuneo P.F., "Beauty and the Beast: Art and Science in Early Modern European Equine Imagery", *Journal of Early Modern History* 4, 3–4 (2000) 274–293.

the equine figure that was based on the manipulation of geometric patterns and mathematical ratios and on the copying of figurative models. While such a formulaic approach certainly facilitated the production of multiple illustrations needed for the augmentation of a book, its implementation, as well as the persistence of specific iconographic traditions, should make us cautious about viewing these illustrations as if they were akin to neutral technical photos. The production of book illustration by artists also raises the question of how much these image professionals actually knew about the finer points of horsemanship their illustrations might have been meant to convey. Nonetheless, Metzger and Thelott's title-page horse in dramatically foreshortened levade served to demonstrate the competence and even the bravado of the book's illustrators.

Identities of rider, reader and artist are constructed in very similar ways in an engraving from a later seventeenth-century horsemanship manual, except that for the rider, the identity constructed is an anti-model. I will therefore focus on how the image and its visual aids mobilize notions of horsemanship that pertain in particular to the reader as rider. Because the antithesis of the ideal identity is presented in this image, it provides an effective pendant to Thelott and Metzger's title-page engraving. Both images promulgate the same values but do so by opposite means. The later engraving also provides a useful example of how an image can provide additional and powerful information that does not specifically appear in the text. It is a mistake to assume that every text/image relationship is one in which the image slavishly illustrates only what the text dictates.

The image in question appears in Winter's *Wolberittener Cavallier* and shows an ill-mounted gentleman; in fact, he is in the process of falling off his horse [Fig. 6].²⁶ This is a highly unusual image because the subject matter is hardly ever illustrated. The engraving, by Cornelius Nicolaes Schurtz (signed in the lower left corner), represents a unique innovation in equestrian iconography, which almost always represents the rider firmly and confidently seated upon his horse's back.²⁷ The

²⁶ Winter Georg Simon, *Wolberittener Cavallier* (Nuremberg, Wolfgang Moritz Endter: 1678). See Cuneo, "Körpertechnik des Reitens" and "Kultur des Reitens" 180–183 and 339.

²⁷ Only Schurtz's name is to be seen on the illustration, but others in Winter's book are also signed by Peter Troschel. For Troschel, see *Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden*



Fig. 6. Cornelis Nicolaes Schurtz, illustration to Georg Simon Winter, *Wolberittener Cavallier* (Nuremberg, Wolfgang Moritz Endter: 1678), part 1, chapter 4, illustration V.

exception to the usually well-mounted riders in visual imagery can be found in emblems where falling riders are represented in connection with vices such as pride and lack of self-control. Considered within the context of such emblems, Schurtz's engraving may very well also resonate with a moralizing message.²⁸

Schurtz's image conveys a narrative. Two men have been riding their horses along the outer perimeter of a wall that seems to enclose a grand palace. Upon reaching one corner where two perpendicular sections of the wall join, the first rider (in the right half of the images) has run into trouble. Something has happened to cause him to fall backward off his horse. Perhaps the horse had shied suddenly at something it had heard behind the wall. As the rider plummets towards earth, the horse displays visible signs of agitation: it swishes its tail vigorously, raises its head high upon a tense neck, pricks its ears alertly in the direction of the wall and picks up its hind leg with a powerful motion. The second rider, in the left half of the image, watches what has happened and will have to attend to manoeuvring his mount away from the falling rider whose swift and violent trajectory is going to place him directly in the path of the second rider's oncoming horse.

When this image is compared with the text that accompanies it, it is clear that the image conveys much more information than is given in the commentary. The book was written by Georg Simon Winter (c. 1629–1701), a horseman who held positions at a number of German courts as well as the Danish court of Christian V (reigned as king of Denmark and Norway 1670–99).²⁹ The engraving appears in the fourth chapter of the book's first section, which is dedicated to the instruction of 'grossen Herren oder Cavaliers' (important lords or gentlemen) in the art of riding. In Chapter Four Winter describes in great detail how the pupil is to achieve the correct position while mounted on the horse. He also warns that if the pupil adopts an incorrect position, namely by thrusting his legs too far out in front, his entire body will

Künstler, vol. XXXIII/XXXIV 431–432; for Schurtz, see Bartum G. (ed.), *Hollstein's German Engravings, Etchings and Woodcuts 1400–1700*, vol. LIV (Rotterdam: 2001) 91–262.

²⁸ See Henkel A. – Schöne A. (eds.), *Emblemata: Handbuch zur Sinnbildkunst des XVI. und XVII. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: 1967) vol. I, 506; II, 1072, 1662.

²⁹ For information on Georg Simon Winter, see Henn A., *Über die pferdeheilkundliche Handschrift des Joachim Christoph Zachen aus dem 18. Jahrhundert nebst einer Würdigung des Georg Simon Winter von Adlersflügel*, Inaugural Dissertation, Veterinary Medicine (Berlin: 1999) 276–282.

fall out of the proper alignment, resulting in the likelihood that the rider will fall out of the saddle even at the horse's slightest misstep. At this point, the reader is directed to study the illustration in question, and the text resumes by addressing a different subject altogether, namely the rider's first lesson at the pillar.

The engraving illustrates neither the correct position of the rider in the saddle nor the incorrect one, both of which are described in specific detail in the text. Instead, it illustrates the potential consequences of the latter, which in the text is only generally described as falling off. The engraving serves to round out the laconic text by literally offering a picture of what that might look like, of visualizing what may happen when the pupil falls off his horse. It is not a pretty sight. First of all, there is the physical danger involved. In the image, the falling rider has not yet reached the ground but the moment of contact is imminent. Because his body is parallel to the ground as he is forcefully propelled backwards, that contact is going to feature the smack of the pupil's head against the hard-packed dirt ground. Not only may the rider suffer a serious, perhaps even fatal head injury from such a fall, but lying flat out on the ground will also put him in danger of being inadvertently trampled or kicked by his own horse and/or the mount of the second rider, who is, according to the text, most likely to be identified as the riding master.

Falling off one's horse imperilled not only life and limb, but also reputation. Winter's book is written at least in part for riding masters, whose job it is to instruct courtiers and/or gentlemen in the art of riding, and may also have been used by such pupils themselves for further reference. For a courtier or a gentleman, whose position in the court/social hierarchy depended in large part on such matters as his skill at horsemanship, fencing, dancing and other such physical activities, losing one's balance and falling off one's horse meant losing face and falling from favour. The image addresses also these dangers by displaying the rider precisely at the most ungraceful and embarrassing moment: as he flies wigless and hatless through the air, his limbs flung inelegantly asunder, his face and his fingers rigidly contorted in fear. The rider has not only lost control of his horse but also of his body and his composure. Adding to the embarrassment is the fact that there are witnesses to this physically and emotionally humiliating scene: the riding master, and the reader/viewer.

In every way, Schurtz's incompetent and compromised pupil is the exact opposite of Metzler and Thelott's masterful and consummate

rider – in every way, that is, except function. Both images serve to instruct and motivate the viewer by visualizing specific identities that the viewer is encouraged to embrace (Metzler and Thelott) or reject (Schurtz). In both images, equestrian iconography plays a key role in communicating those identities, either in drawing on it to reinforce notions of appropriate authority and effective control or subverting it to illustrate the catastrophic consequences of inappropriate authority and ineffective control. The falling rider also serves to remind the viewer that mastering the art of riding is a difficult, even perilous, task. The awkward and dangerous trajectory traced by his falling body may also chart a rising estimation for those who remain firmly in the saddle while their horses execute the most difficult and exacting movements on command.

Riding skillfully and aesthetically was a form of physical display that members of courtly and genteel society were expected to both perform themselves and to evaluate in others. Books such as the *Pferdt-Schatz* and Winter's *Wolberittener Cavallier* were certainly responding to that estimation for the art of riding by providing information and inspiration in a different medium and as an alternative experience to lessons taught by riding masters. However, I argue that these books functioned in a number of ways. Key to all of their functions is the accompanying images. Far from acting as passive and direct mirrors of the text, the images synthesize, mobilize and even amplify what the text offers. Through visual strategies such as the manipulation of equestrian iconography, the images aid in training the reader to improve his riding; to augment the training of his horse; to recognize and affirm the classical, moral, and social ideals involved in riding; and to appreciate the artistry of the illustrations. In other words, the reader is aided in appropriating a courtly identity based ideally on the highest standards of morality, education (including in the classics and about art) and physical ability.³⁰ As is the case with the early modern horse, the

³⁰ For information regarding the nexus of education, riding, and noble ideals in early modern central Europe, see N. Conrads, "Tradition und Modernität im adeligen Bildungsprogramm der Frühen Neuzeit", in Schulze W. (ed.), *Ständische Gesellschaft und Mobilität* (Munich: 1988) 389–403; Heiß G., "Standeserziehung und Schulunterricht. Zur Bildung des Niederösterreichischen Adels in der Frühen Neuzeit", in *Adel im Wandel. Politik, Kultur, Konfession 1500–1700* (Horn: 1990) 390–427; Winkelbauer T., *Fürst und Fürstendiener. Gundaker von Liechtenstein, ein österreichischer Aristokrat des konfessionellen Zeitalters* (Vienna-Munich: 1999) 226–233, 472–484; and Melton E., "Anpassung und Widerspruch im Herrschaftsverständnis: Wolf Helmhard von

likewise ubiquitous early modern illustration tends to appear invisible to the eyes of modern scholars. In fact, both horse and illustration served as essential vehicles for the demonstration and display of early modern ideals and identities.

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