The Reformation of Riding: Protestant Identity and Horsemanship at North German Courts

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Three days before Christmas, in the year 1623, a bizarre and tragic mishap occurred. The Stable-Master (Stallmeister) to Johann Wilhelm, Duke of Saxony-Altenburg (1600–1632), accidentally and fatally slit his own throat with a hunting spear. Just twenty-seven years old, Philipp Christoph von Pretis had been charged by the Duke to assist in a ceremonial pig-hunt. A fine rider but inexperienced huntsman, von Pretis waved the spear above his head and in front of his body in an attempt to keep the press of onlookers at a safe distance from the hunting party and its quarry. But the Stable-Master lost control of the spear and its momentum; the trajectory of its arc brought the blade swinging back around and across his throat. He fell to the ground gravely wounded and, despite all efforts to save him, swiftly bled to death.

The reason we know the details of this sad story is that Duke Johann Wilhelm ordered his court chaplain, Johann Cramer, to eulogise von Pretis at the young Stable-Master’s funeral, and then to have the eulogy published and circulated. The text was in fact printed in Altenburg in 1624, presumably soon after the accident occurred. From Cramer’s introduction preceding the sermon proper, we learn why the Duke was so eager to make the eulogy publicly and widely available. Johann Wilhelm wanted to correct a potentially destabilising story that was evidently gaining traction amongst the citizens of the Lutheran duchy of Saxony-Altenburg. The death of von Pretis, it was rumoured, was no freak accident; instead, it was God’s punishment. What had von Pretis done to deserve the ultimate divine retribution? The structure housing the Stable-Master’s riding school had formerly been a church. Evidently there were those who believed that riding and training horses in a place where the Lord’s Word had been proclaimed and His body made manifest was an act of such profound desecration that von Pretis paid for it with his life.

There are of course many potential explanations for the appeal of this story, the basis of which could well have been founded in underlying disgruntlement(s). Perhaps the populace...
viewed the young Duke’s pig-hunting and highly trained horses as examples of courtly excess. Johann Wilhelm was twenty-three at the time of the accident, and although he shared the title of duke with three other brothers, it was only their eldest brother, Johann Philipp (1597–1639), who actually ruled the small duchy, beginning in 1618. The court chaplain’s text betrays a defensiveness about the Duke and his courtiers’ actions, maintaining that participating in such entertainment as a pig-hunt was neither forbidden nor sinful providing that it was carried out with modesty and at appropriate times. Although it had begun on a Sunday, Cramer is careful to explain that everyone had attended church services before the hunt actually commenced. His hostility towards those spectators not belonging to the court is evident. He describes them as

the common man who tends to intrude on such occasions even though he does not belong there … And this is what happened that day, people crowded the Lords; they were told they should make way, otherwise they might get hurt; some were even led away in hand-cuffs, but nothing helped.

At this highly dramatic narrative juncture enters the spear-swinging Stable-Master, who, in his attempts to force the crowd of eager commoners to move back succeeds only in mortally wounding himself.

Factors other than dislike of Johann Wilhelm may also have played a role in the populace’s interpretation of the accident, although specific information necessary for precise interpretation is lacking. Cramer’s text provides no information regarding the confession of the former church’s original congregation, or who exactly was responsible for its repurposing (whether it was Johann Wilhelm himself, his ruling eldest brother Johann Philipp, his Stable-Master von Pretis, or even someone else). Nonetheless, the outrage over the defilement of the church that we learn about second-hand through the chaplain’s text may have functioned for the citizens as a mechanism to express and mobilise resentments that actually had their roots in other kinds of conflicts altogether, such as confessional tensions or property disputes. Alternatively, perhaps some people really were offended by the presence of animals in a former church and by the simultaneously profane and elitist activities of training them taking place in a once sacred space.

Whatever the actual underlying motives and causes, responses to the accidental death of the young Stable-Master von Pretis certainly point to possible social, economic and/or political strains in the fabric of daily life in Saxony-Altenburg. However, for the purposes of this article, what is significant about the incident and its interpretation as described in Cramer’s text is that they allow the historian to recognise a relationship that has hitherto gone unnoticed in modern scholarship. Namely, that in the experience of early modern people, the practices of horsemanship and those of religion sometimes impinged upon each other.

4 Cramer, Jäger Spies, fol’s Biv r6–C r6. All translations from the German, unless otherwise noted, are mine.
5 The critical exploration of early modern human attitudes towards and practices involving animals animating this article and others would be unthinkable without Keith Thomas and Erica Fudge, whose pioneering works served to create a legitimate and enduring space for such issues within the scholarly remit. What I hope to add here is a look beyond England to the German territories and a consideration of the training of horses in particular while asking if theological discourse had role to play therein.
This fundamental insight provides the springboard to the argument advanced in this article that sheds light on a different dimension of the early modern religion/horsemanship relationship. If the commoners in Cramer’s text seemed to think that the presence of horses and/or the activities involved in training them defiled a sacred space, my research on horsemanship manuals written by trainers at Protestant courts indicates that awareness of specific theological positions and practices may have helped shape the interactions between the men training those horses and the animals for whom they were responsible. In order to make this argument, differences between the highly influential text published in 1550 by the Italian horseman Federico Grisone on the one hand, and horsemanship manuals written by Protestant trainers working at north German courts on the other, will be identified and evaluated. In attending to these differences, specifically Lutheran texts and practices will be introduced and analysed in order to suggest that familiarity with these ideas and exercises may account for the more empathetic attitude towards horses in the Protestant sources.

One of the key demonstrations of early modern courtly magnificence was the performance of equestrian tournaments and ballets held throughout Europe in the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In order to participate successfully in spectacles such as these, and to be admired by all the spectators, a courtier’s horse needed to be trained to obey his rider and to understand specific cues. The first printed text advising riders how to train their mounts in tractability and to execute particular movements was written by Federico Grisone. Based on incomplete and selective readings of Gli ordini di cavalcare (Naples, 1550), the reputation of this Neapolitan riding master has suffered. He does indeed describe some highly questionable and downright horrifying techniques such as this one, offered as a method to punish a horse who refuses to move forward:

Take a cat — the fiercest you can find — and tie it supine to an end of a pole … in such a way that its limbs and head are free. And as the horse resists walking forward … you will place the cat between the horse’s hind legs, and then on the withers, and between the thighs and often between the testicles.

For a horse who insists on tilting his head to one side or another, Grisone also describes the use of a bridle studded with nails, the points of which face inwards and thus prick and rip the horse’s thin skin around his cheeks, muzzle and chin. But to be fair, Grisone designates his ‘cat technique’ as a method to be used ‘only in instances of great necessity when the rider

6 The differences in viewpoint between ordinary citizens on the one hand and courtly horse-trainers on the other would seem to indicate that attitudes relating to horses may well have been shaped in part by social group and status. Differences in social status of course also defined the exact nature of a person’s experience and contact with horses.

7 As Donna Landry has pointed out to me, another group known for the kindness and gentleness with which they treated their horses were the Ottoman Turks. Landry highlights the role of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq (1522–92), the Habsburg ambassador to the Ottoman court of Suleiman the Magnificent between 1555 and 1562, in describing and praising Ottoman practices which he pointedly contrasts with those of Europeans: Donna Landry, Noble Brutes: How Eastern Horses Transformed English Culture (Baltimore, 2009), pp. 133-5. Busbecq’s account of his experiences at the Ottoman court was first published in 1581 as Itinera Constantinopolitanum et Amasianum and so may have been potentially available to the German horsemen under discussion here.


9 Grisone/Tobey, Rules of Riding, p. 343.

10 Ibid., pp. 327-9.
does not have the training, time, or restraint’ to use the more measured and less cruel techniques explicated earlier in the text.\textsuperscript{11} And while Grisone does describe the spike-enhanced bridle, advising the reader carefully to place the nails so that no one can see them, he refers to the contraption as an artificial means and utterly superfluous if the rider implements the correct means at the proper time in the disciplined manner Grisone advises.\textsuperscript{12}

Nonetheless, the fact that Grisone even mentions such dubious techniques and contrivances harmonises with his underlying attitude towards horses. In some senses, he regards them as complex individuals who are almost human-like in their possession and expression of moods, spirits, minds, and even hearts. Essentially, however, he views them as basically recalcitrant beings. Because of their proud nature, laziness and/or fear, horses require harsh disciplinary action, along with measured praise, in order to be transformed into the obedient subjects of human mastery, control and display. The following passage from Grisone exemplifies his attitude:

If the horse, whether for fear of exertion, or for the mood that he has, or for his infinite haughty nature, does not want to come close to the mounting block to be ridden, it will be easier for you to punish him wonderfully and without regard with a large stick between the ears and on the head and on every part of his body except his eyes (since he is incorrigible and very wicked) … but be sure to pat him always when he submits and responds well to you.\textsuperscript{13}

Originally published in 1550, Grisone’s \textit{Ordini di cavalcare} dominated contemporaneous discourse on horsemanship in the German territories of the Holy Roman Empire. First translated into German in 1566, Grisone’s text was printed in German translation five times in the second half of the sixteenth century alone, not counting the pirated and uncited iterations of the Neapolitan’s text embedded in other German horsemanship manuals published before 1600.\textsuperscript{14} Disseminated to German-speaking audiences were not only Grisone’s techniques but also the Neapolitan’s profoundly negative conception of horses as proud, lazy, fearful, stubborn and wicked creatures that deserve at every instance of disobedience to be thoroughly thrashed.

Yet a handful of German training texts produced in the opening decades of the seventeenth century prove to be startlingly original and unique. In stark contrast to Grisone and his German followers, these authors describe and promote interactions between a trainer and his horse that are based on love and knowledge. Although there is no precise information

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 343. \\
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 329. \\
\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 105. \\
\textsuperscript{14} The first printed German translation was undertaken by Veit Tufft and Hans Fröhlich of Augsburg, both Stable-Masters to Marx Fugger (1529–1597). Their translation was published in 1566 in Augsburg. A new translation of Grisone into German was undertaken by the humanist scholar Johan Fayer with a first edition published in Augsburg in 1570. For the connection between early modern scholars and hippological literature, see Pia F. Cuneo, ‘(Un)Stable Identities: Hippology and the Professionalization of Scholarship and Horsemanship in Early Modern Germany’, in Karl A. E. Enenkel and Paul J. Smith (eds), \textit{Early Modern Zoology: The Construction of Animals in Science, Literature and the Visual Arts}, vol. 2 (Brill, 2007), pp. 339-59. Further editions of Fayer’s translation appeared in 1573, 1580, and 1599 (all in Augsburg). Uncited redactions of Grisone’s work appeared in German horsemanship manuals written by Marx Fugger (1578/1584), Hans Friderich Hörwart von Hohenburg (1577/1581), and ‘LVC’ (1584). Of these, only Fugger treats some of Grisone’s information with healthy scepticism. For Fugger’s hippological and humanist pursuits, see Pia F. Cuneo, ‘Marx Fugger’s \textit{Von der Gestüterey}: Horses, Humanism and Posthumanism in Early Modern Augsburg’, in Reingard Spanning, Reinhard Heuberger \textit{et al} (eds), \textit{Tiere-Texte-Transformationen: Kritische Perspektiven der Human-Animal Studies} (Bielefeld, 2015), pp. 69-84.
about the men’s own personal beliefs, they were all active within Protestant networks and institutions through family ties and professional occupations, and all served at Protestant (either Lutheran or Calvinist) courts. Comparing their work to Grisone’s reveals the striking difference in attitudes towards animals and attendant practices as articulated by these three German horsemen situated in their Protestant court contexts.

Grisone’s training methods, without being cited as such, are excerpted in Books Four and Five of Georg Engelhard von Löhneysen’s, *Della Cavalleria*, volume one, published in Remlingen in 1609. Löhneysen (1552–1622) became Riding Master to Augustus, Elector of Saxony (1526–1586), in 1575. Eight years later, he entered the service of the dukes of Brunswick and Lüneburg: first Julius (1528–1589), and then his son Heinrich Julius (1564–1613). The Elector, the dukes, and their respective courts in Dresden and Wolfenbüttel were all Lutheran. While there can be no doubt that Löhneysen used Grisone’s text in these sections of *Della Cavalleria*, a close reading reveals that he did so selectively. Löhneysen did include passages from Grisone that encourage hitting, whipping, spurring and yanking, yet the especially disturbing descriptions of the cat-technique and the bridle of hidden torment, for example, are entirely absent.

In addition, preceding the discussion of training methods in Books Four and Five, Book Three of *Della Cavalleria* describes the various offices of a princely stable. According to Löhneysen, the Stable-Master should not only be loyal, honourable and honest, he should also be pious. These qualities of character should be supported by ‘an especially deep delight in and a sheer innate love for horses.’ In addition to knowledge, piety and love, the trainer must also possess patience: ‘What the horse doesn’t learn today he can learn tomorrow. You must be patient. In order to bloom, the rose needs time.’

Löhneysen’s emphases on the virtues of patience and piety are reinforced in the Stable Ordinance (*Stallordnung*). The seventh states that ‘each rider is to treat his horse properly and gently, to ride his horse conscientiously and with modesty; he must not exercise any violence.’ The third ordinance maintains that no one in the stable is to fail to attend church. Should princely duties hinder some of the stable personnel in their attendance, the Stable-Master is responsible for making copies of the Bible, Luther’s house postil (a collection of sermons to be read outside of church in the domestic sphere), his catechism and a book of hymns available in the stables so that the workers (Knechten) can read and hear the Word of God. Young stable lads (Stalljungen) should be taught how to pray, and every morning

17 Löhneysen, *Della Cavalleria*, p. 142: ‘Er sol Trew/Erbar/Fromb und auffrichtig sein … er soll auch eine sonderliche grosse Lust und schier angeborne Liebe zu den Pferden … haben … denn es fuer war ein muehsam Ampt ist.’
18 Löhneysen, *Della Cavalleria*, p. 144: ‘Es ist auch hoch von Noehten/ das ein Bereiter gedueldig sey/ sich den Zorn im Reiten nicht ubergehen lass/ wie dan der gemeine brauch/ und wird kaum unter zehen einer gefunden/ der diese Tugendt der Gedult an ihm hat/ was ein Pferdt Heut nicht lernet/ das kan es Morgen lernen/ darzu gehoeret patientia, dan zeit bringt Rosen.’
19 Löhneysen, *Della Cavalleria*, p. 147: ‘Zum siebenden: Sollen die Bereiter mit ihren untergebenen Pferden sitsam und gemach umgeben/ dieselbem mit fleiss und guter bescheidenheit Reiten/ und an solchen keine gewalt uben/ oder ungewoenhliche Reuterey zu derselben verderben fuennehmen.’
20 For the roles of Luther’s house postil and catechistical writings in the processes of popular indoctrination, see Susan Karant-Nunn, ‘Preaching the Word in Early Modern Germany’, in Larissa Taylor (ed.), *Preachers and People in the Reformations and Early Modern Period* (Leiden, 2001), pp. 193-220; and Gerhard Bode, ‘Instruction of the Christian
and evening one of the lads should read a chapter or two from the Bible to all the assembled workers.\textsuperscript{21} This list of ordinances may very well be at least as aspirationally as actually normative, and it is perhaps indicative that it is the lower levels of the stable personnel who are required to pray, sing, and read. Nonetheless, particular values are being expressed here that to my knowledge are not found in earlier printed horsemanship manuals. Such admonitions are entirely absent in Grisone and in the texts of his German followers, some of whom we know to have been Catholic.\textsuperscript{22}

Availability of the Bible, a hymnal and Luther’s house postil are also mentioned in the 1614 Ordinances for the stables of the Saxon Elector Johann Georg in Dresden (1585–1656).\textsuperscript{23} The ordinances date from the third year of his rule. He had succeeded to the electorate following the death of his older brother, Christian II (1583–1611). And it is Christian’s former horse-trainer, Christoph Jakob Lieb, who provides a second example of a German text arising from a Protestant court context that emphasises knowledge and empathy. Lieb’s riding manual \textit{Practica et Arte de Cavalleria} was first published in 1616. He understands that the trainer must deal with a horse’s opposition, but Lieb rejects the kinds of practices we find described by Grisone, including in the passage quoted earlier that advocates beating the horse between the ears and on the head with a heavy stick. Lieb, in contrast, states:

I do not like the punishments that some people use, such as jabbing the horse with spikes, or burning him with fire, or wrapping a rope around his genitals and then yanking on it when he attempts to disobey … [or] beating him with whips or clubs between his ears and on his head; I do not like this because two plates of the horse’s skull join together at this place and by striking the horse here one can easily break the skull apart; if this happens then the horse will surely die.\textsuperscript{24}

Rather than simply beating the opposition out of the animal, as Grisone advocates, Lieb激活is his knowledge of equine anatomy to warn against the dire consequences of such brutal actions.

Lieb also rejects the elaborate system proposed by Grisone that purportedly allowed a person to know with certainty the exact nature of a horse by noting superficialities such as the colour of his coat, the location of his cowlicks, and the shapes and occurrences of white markings, such as blazes and stockings. For example, Grisone offers observations such as these without any critical commentary whatsoever:

\begin{verbatim}
   Faith by Lutherans after Luther’.
\end{verbatim}
A horse with a stocking on the right forefoot will be rideable but tends to be unlucky. The horse with a stocking on the left forefoot is not to be held in much esteem. The horse with a stocking on two forelegs will be unlucky and ill-fortuned. The horse with a stocking on the left fore and the right hind will be very prone to death and falls easily.25

Lieb counters with:

It is true that, as far as the different colours and markings are concerned, one can to a certain extent distinguish the nature of a horse. Nonetheless, through personal experience and diligent observation, I have found that these external signs are unreliable, and that a trainer who relies only on them will often find himself betrayed. For these reasons, the trainer should focus much more on the interior signs of the horse’s disposition which he will recognise through experience in and observation while riding.26

Knowledge gained by doing and feeling, by aware interaction between horse and rider as advocated by Lieb allows the human to respond to the animal he is training with empathy. As I have discussed elsewhere, the title page of Lieb’s manual features a poem that purports to convey the horse’s own voice.27 Such is the extent of Lieb’s empathy that he feels he can even speak for the animal. In the poem, the horse laments the many inept riders to whom he is subjected and whose own faults they blame on him. And yet, the horse concludes, even though he tries very hard to accommodate them, all such riders ever respond with is thanklessness.

Some of the most inept and thankless riders are in fact Italians, according to the third early seventeenth-century German, Gabriel von Danup (d. 1629). His remarkable pamphlet, titled The Horses’ Supplication, was published in 1623, at a time when von Danup had recently left his post as horse-trainer at the court of the Elector of Brandenburg, Georg Wilhelm (1595–1640). The Elector was Calvinist but his state, already under his father, was bi-confessional, meaning that both Lutheranism and Calvinism were practiced. Four years after publication of his text, von Danup found employ as an officer of the royal stable at the Lutheran court of the Danish King Christian IV (1577–1648).28

Von Danup’s text features an antagonistic dialogue between Wilhelm Ludwig, Count of Nassau-Dillenburg (1560–1620), and Pirro Antonio Ferraro, a disciple of Grisone and author of Cavallo frenato (Naples, 1602).29 Count Wilhelm functions as von Danup’s mouthpiece as well as the horses’ designated spokesman. The topic of debate is the correct practice of horse training. The problem with Italian riders, according to Count Wilhelm, is that they lack both knowledge and empathy. He criticizes the Italians for focusing too much on the horse’s head and forcing it into an unnatural position ‘with the forehead in front of the

26 Lieb, Practica, pp. 1-2.
28 Raised as a Lutheran, Georg Wilhelm’s father, Johann Sigismund (1572–1619) had converted to Calvinism in 1613, only six years before his death. Because there was such opposition amongst his subjects to adopting Calvinism, Johann Sigismund allowed bi-confessionalism in Brandenburg, which continued under his son and successor, who had also converted. Thomas Klein, ‘Georg Wilhelm’, in Neue Deutsche Biographie 6 (1964), pp. 203-04. (Online: https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd10216156.html#ndbcontent [accessed 4 September 2019]). For von Danup, see Van der Horst (ed.), Great Books on Horsemanship, pp. 264-5; and for Pirro Antonio, ibid, pp. 418-21.
29 Gabriel von Danup, Ein sonderliches newes und lesewürdiges Gesprach…wegen Übergebung einer kläglichen Supplication der Pferde… (no place of publication, 1623).
mouth, and the mouth pulled backwards toward the rider. This kind of riding in which the mouth is pulled so far backwards that it almost touches the chest is what dressage riders today refer to as the infamous ‘Roll-Kur’ and what modern-day veterinarians like Gerd Heuschmann have excoriated because of the great harm it does to the horse, not to mention the fact that, thus contorted, the horse can hardly breathe. According to von Danup, anyone who has carefully observed a horse running free knows that his power is in his hindquarters, not his forehead. Consequently the goal of training should be to develop and strengthen the hind end, and not, like the Italians were doing, to burden and break down the weaker forehand.

Because they lack knowledge and work against nature, it is no wonder, Count Wilhelm observes, that the Italians have trouble with their horses. Indeed, echoing Grisone’s fundamental attitude, Pirro Antonio describes the rider’s relationship to the horse as essentially antagonistic; because horses are basically unwilling creatures, the only way to deal with their multifarious strategies of resistance such as fury, stubbornness, intractability, bolting, rearing and so on, is to punish them. And punish the horses they did, as explicated in the horses’ supplication that they bring to Count Wilhelm in which they recount their experiences of being trained. They describe being whipped and beaten about the head and between the ears, being stabbed from the ground by unmounted men with iron spikes, and having their mouths ripped open and bloodied. They recount how their nasal cartilage is laid bare by frequent and harsh jerking of the caveson-rein; how their heads are tied down to their chests, or to one side or another, and how they remain thus constrained and contorted for hours on end. Part of their martyrdom, as they call it, consists of being screamed at and cursed and told to go to the devil. The horses conclude their supplication with the words:

We most humbly plead to be rescued from these torments, to be protected from undue violence, to have mercy shown to us … We most humbly plead that we be trained by methods free of torture and based on true science and skill so that we may be taught to be of use and service to humankind.

Von Danup’s attitude towards horses is so profoundly empathetic that he feels he can see the world from their perspective and actually speak for them. The function of his remarkable and deeply disturbing description of their experiences was surely to awake in the readers of his text a similar sense of empathy and compassion for horses that would then be implemented by other horse-trainers and/or recognised, valued and insisted upon by members of the nobility who hired them.

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Unlike Grisone and his German followers, these three horsemen Loehneysen, Lieb and von Danup, characterise the ideal interactions between a trainer and his horse as based on patience,
piety, love, knowledge, mercy, empathy, and gentleness. The emphasis on these qualities, so different from the attitude of Grisone, may stem at least in part from Protestant ideas, values and practices available and embraced in Protestant court contexts. Certain aspects of Luther’s theological thought are suggestive in terms of their promulgation of an attitude towards animals similar to the one articulated and apparently actuated by Löhneysen, Lieb and von Danup. Evidence of such an attitude may be found in two sources, both of which would have been potentially available to the horsemen: Luther’s printed commentaries on Genesis, which will be discussed at some length, and his house postil. Before analysing these texts, however, it is necessary to contextualise Luther’s ideas about animals, particularly horses, in terms of his own experiences and attitudes.

Like the vast majority of early modern people, Martin Luther (1483–1546) would have seen, probably touched, and certainly smelled horses on a regular basis. Horses were everywhere in early modern towns and countryside, fundamental to everything from agricultural production and transport, to warfare and ceremony. Luther, who lived in Wittenberg essentially from 1508 until the last weeks of his life, may in fact have personally witnessed tournaments organised by the Saxon court and performed publicly in the city. He may also have been familiar with horses through his father’s involvement in the mining industry in Mansfeld. Several of the woodcut illustrations in Georgius Agricola’s treatise on mining, first published in 1556, illustrate the use of horses to provide both power and haulage.

Luther does not seem to have ridden horses very much and a few spare sources indicate that he was not very good in the saddle, probably through lack of experience. As opposed to using the animal simply to get from one place to another, to ride a horse with skill and tact takes years of training. This fact explains why the art of horsemanship was considered one of the main characteristics of the nobility, who would have had the time, opportunity, and the access to finely bred horses needed to learn these skills. Not surprisingly, as the son of an aspiring mining entrepreneur, then as a law student and finally as a monk, Luther was surely never trained in the art of horsemanship and was therefore most likely not a very adept rider. According to Luther himself, it was his poor horsemanship that initiated his first direct contact with a man who would become one of the reformer’s staunchest allies. Luther encountered Count Albrecht of Mansfeld (1480–1560) in 1518 on the road as each was returning home from the Diet of Augsburg; Luther’s lack of riding skill drew him to the Count’s bemused attention. Instead of on horseback, Luther most likely experienced travel as a passenger in wagons, a certainly less expensive and generally safer form of transport than riding for those who possessed neither horse nor training. In a letter written by Luther in 1521 he in fact complained about the great difficulty he experienced having to ride on horseback from Altenstein to the Wartburg. He also expressed clear concern about the risks of handling and riding these powerful animals confronted by untrained and inexperienced men like himself. In a petition he wrote to the Elector Johann Friedrich in 1545, Luther requested that the prince require villagers in need of priests to provide wagons both to pick them up and then to return them

36 The court artist Lucas Cranach the Elder, who also became a close friend of Luther’s, commemorated several of these tournaments in woodcut prints: see Dieter Koeplin and Tilman Falk, Lukas Cranach: Gemälde, Zeichnungen, Druckgraphik, vol. I (Basel, 1974), pp. 227-31.
37 Georgius Agricola, De re metallica libri XII (Basel, 1556), for example Book VI, pp. 138-40, 181: (http://www.digitalis.uni-koeln.de/Agricola/agricola_index.html [accessed 4 September 2019]).
home. It was not right, according to Luther, to expect priests to get on a horse and ride out to some hamlet given that they were most likely completely unprepared for such activity. Riding a horse in the dark of night in unfamiliar territory was not just uncomfortable, it was also hazardous.

Close contact with horses involved physical dangers but perhaps Luther also sensed other kinds of perils posed by these animals. He held any kind of ritual in contempt that involved what smacked to him of superstition. Horses were sometimes involved in such rituals; for example, they were led to the church on the feast day of Saint Blase (Blasius) and given consecrated water to drink in order to ensure their future good health. Horses were taken on pilgrimages not as modes of transportation but to be cured of their own ailments. Luther strongly rejected such practices and he also condemned particular funeral rituals in which horses were present in the church. In preparation for the funeral of the Saxon Elector Friedrich III following his death in May 1525, Luther reviewed the traditional funeral ritual. Some aspects of the ritual Luther wanted to keep, such as ringing the bells and giving alms to the poor. However, leading particular stallions around the altar at certain moments in the mass was definitely to be taken out. He condemned such practices as ‘barbaric’.

Johann Cramer, the court chaplain of the Duke of Saxony-Altenburg, also mentions this practice in the published eulogy of Philipp von Pretis discussed at the beginning of this article. Cramer points to the hypocrisy involved in tolerating such practices in which horses were brought into churches during the funerals of noblemen on the one hand, and objecting to the location of von Pretis’s riding school in a repurposed church on the other.

But if Luther was somewhat wary of horses in particular, his extensive commentaries on Genesis, and the relationship between humans and creation described therein, pulse with joy and delight in the natural world, including animals. Luther lectured on the book of Genesis at the University of Wittenberg for the entire decade before his death: from 1535 to 1545. In the preface to the first volume of his commentaries on Genesis, printed in 1544 in Wittenberg, Luther specifically states that he permits these lectures to be published. He refers to them as ‘these few goat hairs of mine,’ drawing upon a metaphor he developed in the preface’s previous paragraph: ‘Everyone brings the offering to the tabernacle he can afford. One brings gold, another silver, another…the skins or the hair of goats. For the Lord has need of all these things.’ Luther’s comparison of his biblical exegesis to the hair growing from the skin of a goat signals both the reformer’s ostensible modesty as well as the suitability he perceived in likening the fruits of his intellect and faith to the natural outgrowths of an animal body.

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43 D. Martin Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Briefwechsel, vol. 4 (Weimar, 1933), nr. 862, p. 488. The letter is from Luther to Spalatin, [Wittenberg], 7 May 1525.
44 Cramer, Jäger Spies, fol. Aiv v: ‘Es wundert mich/ was diese Lesterr sagen würden … wenn sie sehen/ wie/ in und bey grosser Herren Begräbnissen die Pferde in die Kirchen geführet werden/ und unter der Predigt dorinnenstehen?’
Luther no doubt had many reasons for interpreting Genesis the way he did during these particular years, but certainly a programmatic affinity for animals was not one of them. There is no shadow of a doubt that the reformer was a dyed-in-the-wool anthropocentrist. His discussion of animals functions primarily as commentary on humans. Many of Luther’s statements are thus about human superiority over animals: for example, humans can calculate and measure, they possess a sense of time, and hope for an eternal future, while animals, according to Luther, have none of these. ‘The pig, the cow, the dog cannot measure the water they drink, but man can measure even the heavens.’ In addition, only humans are made in God’s own image, and humans’ power over animals derives from God’s commandment to Adam that he should exercise dominion over them. Furthermore, what Luther at times asserts about animals, including those statements just reviewed, does not depart significantly from notions articulated by earlier thinkers.

Nonetheless, three topics treated by Luther, even if not entirely unprecedented, would perhaps have struck those who regularly came in contact with animals as deeply meaningful. First is the profound and eternal love that God, according to Luther, still feels and will always feel for His creatures. It is one thing to note the general goodness of God’s creation. It is another to assert, as Luther does, that His creation called forth in God feelings of protective love and delight.

Therefore when the text says ‘And God saw that it was very good’, it refers to preservation because the creature could not continue in existence unless the Holy Spirit delighted in it and preserved the work through this delight of God in His work. God did not create things with the idea of abandoning them after they had been created, but He loves them ... Therefore He is together with them.

God’s presence abides in each one of His creatures, at the beginning, in the present, and at every moment in time that is yet to come. The reason that God remains with them is not out of duty, or loyalty, or because they have earned it. It is simply in the nature of God, and in the ontology of His creatures as His works, that call forth from God this eternal outpouring of love and delight.

The second relevant topic is Luther’s characterization of the nature of Adam’s pre-lapsarian dominion. Luther notes: ‘On the fifth day dominion was committed to [Adam] over the fish and the birds. On the sixth day the same dominion was entrusted to him over all the beasts, that he might use all the rich blessings of these creatures freely according to his necessities.’ But just what were those necessities? Luther maintains that animals were not killed in Paradise because the trees and their fruit, the grains and the plants, provided Adam and Eve with plentiful food. Nor were the hides or hairs of animals necessary to cover Adam and Eve’s innocent and perfect bodies. Rather, dominion over the animals meant that Adam and Eve used their

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47 See also David Clough, ‘The Anxiety of the Human Animal: Martin Luther on Non-human Animals and Human Animality’, in Delia Deane-Drummond and David Clough (eds), Creaturely Theology: On God, Humans and Other Animals (London, 2009), pp. 41-60.
48 Luther / Lenker, Precious and Sacred Writings, p. 93
49 For a discussion of dominant attitudes both before and after Luther, see Gary Steiner, Anthropocentrism and its Discontents: The Moral Status of Animals in the History of Western Philosophy (Pittsburgh, 2005).
51 Clough discusses Luther’s lack of clarity regarding the exact nature and character of Adam’s dominion over the animals, both before and after the fall: ‘Anxiety of the Human Animal’, pp. 45-7.
52 Luther / Lenker, Precious and Sacred Writings, p. 84.
fellow creatures much as God did: as sources of joy and delight. The animals further functioned to augment Adam and Eve’s awe and esteem for their mutual creator: ‘Adam and Eve therefore being thus amply provided with food, needed only to use these creatures to excite their admiration and wonder of God, and to create in them that holiness of pleasure which we can never know in this state of our corrupt nature.’

This dominion, as joyful to Adam and Eve as it was to the animals, had its source in God’s express commandment. Its exercise, however, was based on God’s gift to Adam and Eve of knowledge:

by which they understood all the affections, the senses, the feelings and the powers of all the animals of creation … [W]hat would have been their dominion over all created animals without this knowledge? … That knowledge … , that clear discernment of the natures of all beasts, [is] now utterly lost.

Finally, the third relevant topic is the effect Luther describes of human sin on animals. Prior to the Fall, ‘Adam had a perfect knowledge of all nature of animals … and of all other creatures.’ However, when Adam and Eve fell into disobedience, their sin infected the natural world: ‘[A]ll these thorns and thistles, and this ferocity of beasts, are the consequences of original sin, by which all the rest of the creation contracted a corruption … ’. Luther is saying here that human sin, like a terrible plague, infected and corrupted the animals, causing them to become unknown to humans, to withhold their obedience from them, and even, in some cases, to become their mortal enemies. Human sin is punished by, among other things, animal enmity and recalcitrance.

These ideas had the potential to affect people’s attitudes about animals, especially as Luther meant for his followers to study and learn from Genesis. In his commentaries, Luther repeatedly maintains that his followers should carefully consider the original state of creation as described in this holy text because this is the state to which they will return in God’s kingdom: ‘Let us look at this first creation of the world … as the type and figure of the world to come.’ But the relationships between God and His creatures described in Genesis are not only the perfection that will be re-established at the end of time but they also provide the ideals to which humans in the here and now should already strive, if imperfectly, to attain.

Luther discourses on these conceptions of the actual and the ideal relationship between humans and animals in his lectures published in the first volume of his commentaries on Genesis (Wittenberg, 1544). As printed texts, Luther’s ideas certainly enjoyed wider circulation and dissemination than if they had remained hidden away in students’ lecture notes. In published form, they were potentially accessible and perhaps known to Löhneysen, Lieb and von Danup, at least two of whom belonged to the lower nobility.

Transferring Luther’s ideas about the relationship between humans and animals in Paradise to the relationship between trainer and horse in the manège would mean that the interaction would be characterised by the trainer responding to the animal with deep knowledge and

53 Ibid., p. 128.
54 Ibid., p. 121.
55 Ibid., p. 118.
56 Ibid.
57 Indeed John A. Maxfield argues in his book with its suggestive title — Luther’s Lecture on Genesis and the Formation of Evangelical Identity — that Luther’s commentaries on Genesis were regarded by him as foundational to Reformed identity.
58 Luther / Lenker, Precious and Sacred Writings, p. 85.
abounding love, and within a wider, spiritual context whereby working with the animal became a way of knowing and delighting in the divine. Löhneysen seems to be promulgating just such an interaction when he insists on the Stable-Master’s piety, his great love of horses, and his responsibility to make the word of God and Luther’s interpretation of it present and accessible in the stable. Loving the animals entrusted to the Stable-Master and to the trainer’s care would parallel the love that God feels for His creatures. Like reading and hearing the Bible, working with the animals could also be a way of knowing God and delighting in His works. Lieb’s and von Danup’s demand that knowledge must be the foundation of interaction between human and animal echoes Luther’s description of the pre-lapsarian Adam whose deep knowledge of each creature’s affections, senses and feelings (to paraphrase Luther) was answered by the animals’ joyful submission. Indeed it is just such knowledge for which the tormented horses beg in their supplication penned by von Danup. Furthermore, equine recalcitrance could have been understood not as Grisone did, as a simple manifestation of the horse’s basic nature, but instead as the result of original human sin that likewise corrupted the animals. Encountering a horse’s disobedience might have provided the trainer with an ideal opportunity to reflect on humankind’s post-lapsarian sinful nature and thus to consider his own role in and responsibility for the animal’s behaviour.

Other iterations of Luther’s theology were physically available to and thus potentially influential on the attitudes and practices of early modern horsemen. As noted earlier, the Bible, a hymnal, and works by Luther — his catechism and his house postil — were to be made accessible in the court stables in Dresden and Wolfenbüttel. According to Löhneysen, these volumes were not in the stable just for decoration; personnel were officially directed by the ordinances to engage actively with these texts. Therefore we may posit at least a general awareness in these settings of some of the reformer’s basic theology.

More specifically, Luther’s house postil potentially served as a practical conveyance of the reformer’s ideas that horsemen may have found strikingly apposite to their work with the animals. For example, in his sermon on the sixth Sunday after the Feast of the Holy Trinity, Luther states that obeying the fifth commandment ‘thou shalt not kill’ is not just a matter of refraining from the extreme act of actually killing someone. Obedience resides especially in the more quotidian task of guarding against the effects of anger that can flood the heart with rage, drive the hand to harsh action, or fill the mouth with curses and taunts. It is exactly these actions of human hands (the beating, stabbing, ripping, jerking, and tearing), and of men’s mouths (the screaming and cursing) that von Danup’s horses decry in their supplication. Within this Lutheran frame of reference, abusing the animal body imperilled the human soul.

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Scholars of the Reformation, of hippology and of early modern courts may all be surprised to learn that the sounds one might hear in a princely Protestant stable would not only include the nickering, neighing and snorting of horses, but also the singing, praying and biblical recitations of humans. Just as the horses were there to be cared for and trained, the word of God was also resident in the stables, likewise to be nurtured and exercised. As a movement that had initially

sought to reconsider the relationship between humans and their God, the Reformation in the stables may also have led some to rethink the relationship between humans and their horses.60

Early seventeenth-century texts by Georg Engelhard von Löhneysen, Christoph Jakob Lieb and Gabriel von Danup offer insights into the imbrication of horsemanship practices and Reformation theology. Differing markedly from Grisone’s highly influential treatise Gli ordini di cavalcare in their attitudes towards horses, Löhneysen, Lieb and von Danup emphasised engagement with the animals based on piety, love, knowledge and empathy. All three men were active as horse-trainers at Protestant courts.

Based on the analysis of specific texts by Martin Luther, this article has argued that the profound differences between Grisone on the one hand, and Löhneysen, Lieb and von Danup on the other, may have been the result of Lutheran theology and practices activated and promulgated at Protestant courts. In some senses, this argument could perhaps be strengthened by demonstrating that Luther’s ideas about animals differed starkly from those held by the Roman Church and by other reformers such as John Calvin. Yet I am not sure whether this demonstration is possible or even necessary. Much more work needs to be done on the role of animals in early modern theological discourse in order to parse carefully individual facets, directions, and changes within multiple theological discourses. The work that already does exist points to considerable inconsistency on this topic even within the thought of individual theologians, such as Luther and Calvin.61 Attempts to pronounce any singular, internally coherent position of the medieval or early modern Roman Church on animals are probably only partially useful.62 I suspect that early modern people heard more of a vigorous cacophony than a harmonious concert when it came to theological (and other) voices interpreting the relationships between human and animal. It therefore becomes the historian’s role not so much as to reduce and simplify but to acknowledge plurality and complexity while also staying attuned to where and when a particular chorus of voices might be heard to echo within a particular practice.

Arguing that Löhneysen, Lieb and von Danup may have been influenced by some of Luther’s ideas is not to say that they were therefore necessarily and actively rejecting the ideas of Calvin, other reformers, or the Roman Church. They surely knew more about horses than about comparative theology. But how else would a person demonstrate their Lutheran identity other than by embracing and implementing Luther’s ideas? And when those ideas are actively implemented in the practice of horsemanship, a practice so utterly foundational to courtly life and culture, then such horsemanship may well have served not only as a demonstration of technical skill but, even more importantly, as a performance of courtly

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60 In order to add more substance to this argument, further texts by Luther must be examined as well as a more thorough study of the dissemination of his ideas both in print and from the pulpit. In addition, it would be interesting to compare these attitudes towards animals and training practices with Lutheran attitudes towards children and pedagogical practices. My thanks to the anonymous reader for these suggestions.


62 For example, Gary Steiner’s Anthropocentrism and its Discontents provides an extremely useful overview of the dominant strands of thought about animals from antiquity to post-modernity, as my earlier citation of his work demonstrates. Enterprises such as this definitely have important functions to fulfil. However, the necessary generalisations involved can prove misleading. Steiner moves directly from a chapter on ‘The Status of Animal in Medieval Christianity’ to the next which discusses Descartes. Martin Luther appears in a terse sentence at the end of the former chapter: ‘This legacy [of Scripture and its interpretation by Thomas Aquinas] persists virtually unmodified throughout the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance thought of Martin Luther’ (p. 131).
Protestant identity. At events such as tournaments and equestrian ballets, both observers and participants may have been reminded of Luther’s teachings about Genesis and individual piety. The mutual delight exhibited by horse and rider, the horse’s joyful response to his rider’s knowledge, gentleness and empathy may have appeared to some as a re-enactment of Adam in Paradise, where both human and animal encounter each other in loving and reciprocal celebration of their common creator.

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