A History of Natural Horsemanship
From Ancient Times to the Present

By
Allan J. Hamilton, MD
Training horses has been an integral part of the march of civilization. Over millennia, the methods and principles of horse training have undergone profound changes, culminating in what has become a worldwide movement of non-coercive, natural horsemanship. The history of horsemanship can be conceptualized as two major, divergent schools: the first is the classical dressage movement from the Old World, and the second is the vaquero tradition of the New World (see Figure 8.1). The dressage tradition is historically ancient, rooted in Eurasian and European civilizations. It stretches three millennia from before 1000 BC to the present. By comparison, the vaquero tradition is brief, spanning little more than a few centuries from the colonies of New Spain in the early nineteenth century to today.

There are significant differences distinguishing these two disparate, “hemispheric” movements—akin to the differences between the two sides of the brain, and the Eastern and Western halves of the globe (see Figures 8.2 and 8.3).

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1 Cited in: http://www.quotegarden.com/horses.html
Figure 8.1: The front page of the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) which divided the newly discovered lands in Africa, America and Asia between the dominions of the kingdoms of Spain and Portugal. (http://www.wikiwak.com/image/Folio01r.jpg)
Figure 8.2: In 1494, when the Treaty of Tordesillas was drawn up, very little was known about the lands of the Americas and Asia and the Pacific. Therefore the map that accompanied the treaty contained very little geographic information outside of known trade routes close to Europe. (http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/images/tordesillas.jpg)

The two movements demonstrate dramatic distinctions as well as telling convergences in philosophy and technique. Both are punctuated by figures who became advocates of employing gentler, more humane techniques for training horses at times when such attitudes represented minority--sometimes revolutionary--views within the prevailing schools of horsemanship.

In the Eastern or European tradition, training techniques were handed down through manuscripts and, later, texts and schools of equitation. Sometimes, the chain was broken and the pearls of wisdom from one generation remained dormant for centuries until a new champion took up the cause, adding his own personal insights to what had
already been written. On the other hand, the methods of the vaquero, of the Western cowboy, were entrusted to oral tradition until very recently.

Figure 8.3: A map made in London in 1659. Two hundred years after the Treaty of Tordesillas, more of the world had now been mapped and the world has effectively been divided into the Eastern and Western hemispheres. This had significant implications of the emerging world of horsemanship. The Eastern hemisphere would become the world of classical European dressage, while the Western hemisphere would become the world of the vaquero and western cowboy cultures. (http://alteagallery.com/jpegs/9676.jpg)

Classical European Horsemanship

This period is often said to begin with the Greeks but was, in fact, ushered in by Kikkuli, a master horse trainer from Mitanni, a kingdom in ancient Mesopotamia, near

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where Turkey, Iraq, and Syria are found today. The Mitanni realm was recognized as a region that produced some of the best horse trainers of its day. Kikkuli came into the employ of the Hittite King, Suppiluliuma I, in 1345 BC.

Kikkuli and the Hittites:

We know a fair amount about Kikkuli because he authored a text (see Figure 8.4) about the training of horses for use in combination with the war chariot. This text must have been considered noteworthy as several copies and many later versions exist from different periods of the Hittite Empire. In addition, Kikkuli’s text has been extensively studied by linguists because it was written with a blend of several languages, including Sanskrit like words, Mitannian terms, and expressions borrowed from the ancient Luwian and Hurrian tongues. These multiple linguistic sources of the text have yielded enticing insights into the evolution of the Indo-European tongues.

Fig 8.4: The opening lines of the Kikkuli (Hittite) tablets. The first known text on horsemanship in the world is more than three thousand years old. (http://www.pen-kurd.org/fransi/ali-kilic/la-qua2.jpg)
Kikkuli’s text gives us his unique, personal, 214-day-long regimen to train and condition horses for the Hittite cavalry. Not all of his writings invoke humane treatment of horses. For example, he had horses enclosed for periods of up to ten days in poorly ventilated, humid enclosures so he could stress them and root out the animals more susceptible to respiratory illness. His routine revolved more around their physical and cardiovascular development than actual training. He advocated feeding horses hay three times a day and alternating intense exercise periods with long rest periods—akin to some of the modern versions of interval training used for conditioning endurance horses.

Kikkuli\(^3\) endorsed long periods of trotting and loping before ever hitching horses to chariots and recommended rub-downs when the horses were stabled after exercise. It was Kikkuli’s methods that led to the powerful military dominance of the Hittite cavalry and chariots (see Figure 8.5).

\(^3\)Kikkuli surviving texts are indexed in the *Catalogue des Textes Hittites* (CTH); multiple copies exist in different museums, including CTH 284, best preserved, Late Hittite copy (13th century), CTH 285, contemporary Middle Hittite copy with a ritual introduction, CTH 286, contemporary Middle Hittite copy, and CTH 284 consists of four well preserved tablets or a total of 1080 lines.
Later, as his techniques faded from memory or were incorrectly applied, the might of the Hittites dissolved back into the dust of history.

In 1991, Ann Hyland, a historian of equestrian techniques, rigorously applied Kikkuli’s methods to train horses and the results were later carefully evaluated by veterinary physiologists at Sydney University in Australia. These studies were aptly named the Kikkuli Experiments (see Figures 8.6 and 8.7). What Hyland found was that Kikkuli methodologies actually produced significant, measurable cardiovascular improvements in the horses. The intermittent rest periods avoided development of excessive lactic acidosis and subsequent “tying up” of the large muscle groups. “Tying up” can lead to severe muscle damage, called rhabdomyolysis. This can often cripple or kill insufficiently conditioned horses who are forced to over-exert themselves, as can occur during a battle.

Figure 8.6: In 1991, Dr. Ann Hyland developed a series of experiments, known as the Kikkuli Experiments in which she tried to reproduce the endurance training that was enumerated in the thirty-three century-old Kikkuli tablets to modern day horses. Here, research staff can be seen pacing horses with an automobile as part of the experimental protocol. (http://www.kikkulimethod.com/)

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Figure 8.7: Numerous measurements of equine physiology were performed during the course of the Kukkuli experiments. The 3,000 year old methods were found to produce significant improvements in cardiovascular endurance and stamina. (http://www.special.equisearch.com/blog/riderweightloss/uploaded_images/EqSci08-7-30…)

Simon of Athens

Simon of Athens is believed to have lived between 480 and 400 BC. Most of our knowledge about Simon comes to us from his pupil, Xenophon. Simon had a reputation as a talented horse trainer. He said: “Anything forced or misunderstood can never be beautiful. What a horse does under compulsion, he does blindly, and his performance is no more beautiful than would be that of a ballet dancer taught by the whip and spike.”

Thus was initiated the birth of a new movement—natural horsemanship. It issues from

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5 Cited Equine Quotes, Proverbs, & Fables, found at www.geocities.com/aolsen_2000/EquineQuotes.htm
true respect of the horse as a partner to be appreciated rather than exploited. Although it is known that Simon authored his own text, *Peri Hippikes* (translated On Horsemanship), only a single chapter on conformation of horses has survived, housed in Emmanuel College in Cambridge, England.

Simon was famous enough in Xenophon’s day that an equestrian statue was erected in his honor in a sacred sanctuary near Athens. Around the pedestal, bas-reliefs were carved to demonstrate Simon’s exploits. It is said that Simon’s horses served as the inspiration for the horses sculpted into the legendary friezes crowning the Parthenon and part of the famed Elgin Marbles (see Figure 8.8), immortalized by poet John Keats, and housed in the London Museum.

![Fig 8.8: The Elgin Marbles were originally part of the Parthenon temple in Athens and were removed by Thomas Bruce, the 7th Earl of Elgin, from the Acropolis.](http://www.balkantravellers.com/images/stories/curiosity_chest/Elgin_Marbles/elgin_marbles_frieze.jpg)

Xenophon

Xenophon (see Figure 8.9) is believed to have been born in Athens around 431 BC. As a young man, he was a member of a military expedition led by Cyrus into Persia
in 401 BC, Legend has it that Xenophon asked none other than Socrates himself if it was the right thing for him to leave with Cyrus. The Greek philosopher is said to have instructed him to put his question to the Oracle at Delphi. Xenophon instead inquired to which god he should make sacrifice to ensure a safe journey. When he returned to tell Socrates about the admonition from the Oracle to demonstrate his allegiances to the gods, the philosopher was dumfounded that Xenophon had asked such an awkward question. He advised him to just go on the expedition. Cyrus was killed in a clash with the Persians, and the Greeks found themselves leaderless, fighting their way through Mesopotamia to return to Athens.

Figure 8.9: Statue depicting Xenathon (circa 430-354 BC).

Xenophon wrote several treatises, but *On Horsemanship* remains his quintessential work. *On Horsemanship* is a kind of bible, covering almost every pertinent topic in the care, exercise, and riding of horses. Xenophon is remembered most for endorsing a humane, respectful training method with horses. He justly earned the
moniker of “the father of natural horsemanship.” This passage gives a flavor of his teachings:

…You must abstain from pulling at his mouth with the bit, or applying the spur and whip--methods commonly adopted by people with a view to a fine effect, though, as a matter of fact, they thereby achieve the very opposite of what they are aiming at. That is to say, by dragging the mouth up they render the horse blind instead of alive to what is in front of him; and what with spurring and whipping they distract the creature to the point of absolute bewilderment and danger. Feats indeed!--the feats of horses with a strong dislike to being ridden--up to all sorts of ugly and ungainly tricks. On the contrary, let the horse be taught to be ridden on a loose bridle, and to hold his head high and arch his neck, and you will practically be making him perform the very acts which he himself delights or rather exults in; and the best proof of the pleasure which he takes is, that when he is let loose with other horses, and more particularly with mares, you will see him rear his head aloft to the full height, and arch his neck with nervous vigor, pawing the air with pliant legs and waving his tail on high. By training him to adopt the very airs and graces which he naturally assumes when showing off to best advantage, you have got what you are aiming at--a horse that delights in being ridden, a splendid and showy animal, the joy of all beholders. [Translated by Dakyns]6

Fig 8.10: Greek vase, circa 540 BC, depicting Greek riders adjusting their seats and body positions to the movement and gaits of their mounts. (http://nicholnl.wcp.muohio.edu/DingosBreakfastClub/BioMech/BioMechSeatHistory.html)

Alexander the Great of Macedonia

Alexander (356-323 BC) deserves a special mention here. He was a horseman himself, and as the preeminent military leader of his age, he was profoundly affected by Xenophon’s writing, as were all Greek horsemen and cavalrymen of the period (see Figure 8.10). Alexander’s relationship with his famous war-horse stallion, Bucephalus (which means “ox-head,” referring to his large, square head) was a deep bond. It is hard to separate fact from fiction in the stories that have been handed down about the legendary Alexander. Historian Plutarch reports the king, Philip of Macedonia, could not subdue the great black stallion from Thessalia, but his ten year-old son, Alexander, noticed the horse was being startled by his own shadow. The boy turned the horse toward the sun and then swiftly mounted him. This stallion would serve as Alexander’s mount for years (see Figure 8.11) throughout his conquests in the Middle East, Persia, Asia, and on into India. The great horse would meet his end at the battle of Hydaspes, where Alexander defeated the Indian King Porus, in June of 326 BC, in what is now Pakistan.

Figure 8.11: Alexander the Great shown with his great war horse Bucephalus, in the Battle of Issus, as depicted in the famous mosaic floor found in the so-called House of the Fawn in Pompeii, Italy. The mosaic was preserved by the tragic eruption of the Mt. Vesuvius volcano in 79 AD. This now famous Alexander mosaic was uncovered in 1831 and measures nineteen by ten feet and was compromised of nearly four million individual mosaic tile pieces. (http://z.about.com/d/ancienthistory/1/7/8/U/2/BattleofIssus333BC-mosaic-detail1.jpg)
Like much of the Classical writings and art, the teachings of these horsemen were virtually forgotten for the next thousand years until the artistic and intellectual awakening of the Renaissance.

The Middle Ages

The Middle Ages served as a watershed era of horsemanship. During this period the horse reached its apogee as the true instrument of war—the “heavy horse” or charger. This put a premium on the rider being able to stay mounted and use the hands to wield weapons from the advantage of a mobile platform. The addition of stirrups to the saddle was critical. Archeological records suggest the stirrup may have arisen in Assyria and then made its way East to the Mongol empire where it was became widely adopted. By 580 AD, a Byzantine manual on warfare underscored the importance of outfitting cavalry with stirrups. Modern historians have added a unique perspective to the advantages of the stirrup.

Science historian James Burke, in his BBC television series Connections, argued that William the Conqueror’s Norman forces won the day over the Saxon forces under Harold at the Battle of Hastings in 1066 (see Figure 8.12) because they had one major advantage --the stirrup. The Saxons and Normans had fought for most of the day without any one side gaining an advantage. Late in the afternoon, the Normans feigned a retreat that drew the Saxon right flank to chase after them. As they ran downhill after the fleeing Normans, William’s cavalry flew into them and devastated them. The addition of the stirrup permitted the heavily armored Normans to steer their horses into the midst of the Saxons and win by wielding heavier swords and spears from atop their horses.
Fig 8.12: The Bayeux Tapestry depicting the Battle of Hastings in 1064. Note the stirrups which figure so prominently on the feet of the Norman riders. (http://www.arthistoryspot.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/Bayeux-Tapestry.jpg)

Another historian, Lynn White,\textsuperscript{7} has argued it was the stirrup that converted the lighter horseman into the heavily armored knight (see Figure 8.13), the original battlefield equivalent of “shock and awe.” The heavy cavalry could now overwhelm and disrupt traditional infantry formations. But it also solidified the feudal system of nobility, and monarchy itself. Increasing armor ushered in more severe bits, stirrups, and body-gripping saddles. Horses were bred specifically for jousting with heavier frames as they now carried upwards of three hundred and fifty pounds of rider and metal armor into battle. Artifacts from this era show that the Middle Ages were not easy on horses (see Figures 8.14 and 8.15).

\textsuperscript{7} Lynn White, Medieval Technology and Social Change, Oxford University Press, 1966; ISBN 978-0195002669
Fig 8.13: The Middle Ages saw the introduction of heavily armored knight. This also required a heavily muscled horse that could carry upwards of 350 pounds. (http://farm1.static.flickr.com/65/189630532_a894c087e3.jpg)

Figure 8.14: An enormous spade bit, 600-800 AD. (http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/images/h2/h2_47.100.24.jpg)
In the medieval period, hardware used to subdue horses often bordered on the brutal, if not outright sadistic. Horrible spade bits and spiked, sharpened spurs more than a foot in length are testament to the suffering such “princely” horses had to endure. We know from archeological digs of medieval battlefields that horses died there from agonizing, penetrating injuries, and in staggering numbers.

At about the same time, Sir Geoffrey de Charny also wrote a book on jousting and Medieval tournaments, entitled *The Book of Chivalry*. De Charny became one of the fourteenth century’s most renowned knights, after bringing the prized Shroud of Turin (see Figure 8.16) back to Europe. His fame as a knight in battle was so great the King of France permitted him the honor of carrying the Oriflamme, the standard of the royal

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family itself into battle, making himself a high-profile target for enemy knights. Fittingly, de Charny gave his life, defending his King, at the Battle of Poitiers in 1356. De Charny’s book not only evoked the techniques of jousting and combat, but also set out the rules of conduct for knights in the Age of Chivalry.

Figure 8.16: The famous Shroud of Turin brought back to Europe from Constantinople during the Crusades. Many contend it was the shroud in which the body of Jesus Christ was wrapped after it was lowered from the cross when he was crucified. Radiocarbon dating performed in 1988 proves the shroud itself was fabricated in the Middle Ages — more than 1,000 years after the death of Christ. It was brought to Europe by Sir Geoffrey De Charny, the author of a text on jousting.

(http://theunexplainedmysteries.com/images/ShroudTurin.jpg)
In 1433 Duarte (or Edward I) of Portugal (see Figure 8.17) ascended to the throne after a successful military campaign in North Africa. He is best known for his support of his famous brother, Prince Henry the Navigator, who explored the West coast of Africa and established the first Portuguese colonies on that continent. Right before his death, the King wrote *Livro Da Ensinanca De Bem Cavalgar Toda Sela* (The Art of Riding On Any Saddle). It was a comprehensive treatise on jousting, covering such diverse topics as clothing and different types of lances. On his deathbed, he entrusted this volume to his wife. She later carried it with her to Naples where it fell into the hands of the French

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when they captured the city in 1499. The manuscript was later transferred into the Royal Library where it remains to this day.

More typical of the Middle Ages was Frederico Grisone, whose treatise, *Gli Ordini di Cavalcare* (The Rules of Horsemanship),\(^10\) was published in 1561 (see Figure 8.18). Although Grisone (see Figures 8.19 and 8.20) pays homage to Xenophon in his book, his methods routinely were cruel and abusive. For example, he promoted holding a horse’s head under water to the point of near drowning if it exhibited any fear of crossing a body of water, such as a river. Unfortunately, because of Grisone’s fame in Europe as a dressage rider, his methods became widely disseminated and imitated for hundreds of years thereafter. In many ways, the introduction of the heavier, larger warhorses during the Middle Ages (see Figure 8.21) also brought increasingly severe methods to ensure their tractability.

\(^{10}\) Cited in Amanda Murray and Sir Michael Oswald, *All the King’s Horses: Royalty and Their Equestrian Passions from 1066 to the Present Day*, Anova Boos, 2006; ISBN 978-1861059307

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Figure 8.19: Illustrations from Grisone's *Ordini di Cavallere* (1561), depicting some of the elaborate spade bits endorsed in his textbook. (http://www.forumrarebooks.com/application/upload/forum/bimages/6283_4.jpg)

Figure 8.20: Another illustration from Grisone's *Ordini di Cavallere* (1561). (http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_KOwkE4aGHE4/RnkldrfvoII/AAAAAAAAB4/SCa ktLQKpr4/s400/Frederico+Grisone.jpg)
Figure 8.21: The Battle of Poitiers took place on the 19th of September, 1356. Seven thousand English soldiers, including a large contingent of archers decimated the French army numbering anywhere from thirty to sixty thousand because of the lethal effect of the English bowmen, who launched arrows every five seconds. Their volleys left the cream of French nobility dead on the field of battle including the famous horseman, De Charny. This battle marked the beginning of the end of the heavily armored knight as the decisive tool for victory on the battle field.

(http://www.britishbattles.com/100-years-war/poitiers/battle-poitiers.jpg)

A dressage school was found in Naples with Gianbattista Pignatelli. The city had emerged first as a destination where circus riders from Byzantium would come to perform with their horses. L. E. Nolan writes in *Cavalry: Its History and Tactics*\(^\text{11}\):

Thus Naples became the first school for horsemanship in Western Europe. From that city the school was gradually spread over the rest of Italy, and into France and Germany. For some ages, Naples also supplied the best horses for the manège. Down to the close of the sixteenth century, and even to a later period, the Neapolitan horses are frequently mentioned by writers as highly prized in England as well as in most of the continental countries. They divided favor and pre-eminence with the well-bred horses imported from the south of Spain, where the blood of the Arab and the Barb had been liberally infused. As stock, they tended to improve the studs of other countries.

A number of famous cavallerizzi emerged from this Neopolitan school including Cesare Fiaschi (1523-1592), who wrote Trattato dell’imbrigliare, maneggiare, et ferrare cavilli in 1556, in which he elucidated the principle of a rider developing responsive hands: “A good hand,” he wrote, “is the one that can resist and yield when necessary and receive with precision the action created with the legs.”

Another notable Pignatelli pupil was Solomon de la Broue (1530-1610), who became the head groom under the French King Henri IV, Henri de Navarre. He endorsed less harsh and stressful training for the royal horses. Salomon de la Broue was France’s first famous écuyer, advocating the rider use less bit pressure and less prodding with the spurs so as to encourage a horse to become lighter and more responsive.

In 1593, de la Broue wrote La Cavalerie Françasie wherein he introduced the concept of encouraging the horse to yield at the poll and simultaneously relax its lower jaw. He opposed too much use of spurs. However, like many écuyers in these times, he was entirely dependent upon the King’s generosity. And eventually the King’s attentions turned to the arrival of a new, gifted horseman named Antoine de Pulvinel. This was bad luck for de la Broue, who soon found himself out of favor and out of a job. Sadly, he would finish his days penniless and forgotten. De Pulvinel’s star, on the other hand, would not only grow ascendant but burn brightly for centuries to come.

12 Cited in http://tomsastroblog.com/?p=1577&page=270
13 The French word écuyer is roughly translated into “squire” in English. Later the term became a formal, royal appointment, taking on the significance of the title Royal Master of the Horse.
Antoine de Pulvinel:

Pulvinel (see Figure 8.22) first published his work, *Maniege Royal*, dedicated to the French King Louis XIII, in 1624. A year later, the title was changed to *L’Instruction*...
du Roy, En L’Exercise de Monter à Cheval (translated this means: Instruction for the King: Exercises on Horseback) (see Figure 8.23). The text is constructed as a dialogue between the young King, then approximately sixteen years old, and his Master of the Horse, or Ecuyer, Antoine de Pulvinel. What makes his textbook such an important document in the history of horsemanship was that it represented a radical departure from its predecessors. It was a rejection of the largely medieval attitudes still prevalent at the time, and a return to the classical, gentler style of horsemanship advocated by Xenophon. So striking about Pulvinel’s text is, that while it stresses many techniques of “gentling” horses, it remains true to its original vision of providing instruction to a young man on how to improve himself:

To be a graceful Horseman one need only apply one’s eyes to determine what is graceful and what is not, ears to hear, and to have a memory to retain the things one must learn. But to be judicious and competent horseman and know how to properly school horses, each person does so according to his inclination, his energy does so according to his inclination and his disposition.¹⁴

Some of Pulvinel’s principles are so elegantly put they deserve a brief enumeration—a sampling of what is one of the greatest feasts of prose in the service of horsemanship:

…I praise your habit of never demanding more from a horse than half of what he is capable, a very sound theory; for should one do otherwise, both Horseman and horse lose all gracefulness.¹⁵

…One must be quick to caress and flatter the horse every time he obeys or even when he gives the impression of doing so. For horses can obey and understand us only through the diligence of caresses, either with


¹⁵ Antoine de Pulvinel, Ibid, p. 24
the hand, or the clicking of the tongue, or by giving them a tid-bit of grass, bread, sugar, or anything else whenever they perform well.\textsuperscript{16}

One must avoid using force for I have never seen anything positive come out of a horse if such is the case. That is why the goal of all my lessons, which is the gentle schooling of a horse, is to work them gently, for a short while, and often.\textsuperscript{17}

For there is not a horse that does not have his alibi or, rather, his strong-headedness, small or great, and which one must overcome through patience and gentleness rather than force.\textsuperscript{18}

Pulvinel popularized the concept of working horses tied to a single pillar or, more commonly, between two pillars (see Figures 8.24 and 8.25). By constraining the horse’s forward movement, the trainer could work on urging the horse to gradually lift its legs off the ground, eventually leading to the so-called “airs above the ground.”

\textbf{Figure 8.24:} Working a horse between the pillars, a technique that was popularized by de Pulvinel in the 17th century. This is a technique used by the Spanish Riding School of Vienna and other dressage academies to present day.
(http://www.gutenberg.org/files/13403/13403-h/images/etr011.png)

The “airs” are highly acrobatic maneuvers a horse carries out while it is partly or wholly off the ground. This includes maneuvers such as the \textit{levade} (where the horse rears

\begin{notes}
\item[16] Antoine de Pulvinel, \textit{Ibid}, p. 43
\item[17] Antoine de Pulvinel, \textit{Ibid}, p. 93
\item[18] Antoine de Pulvinel, \textit{Ibid}, p. 94
\end{notes}
up and holds its forequarters off the ground), the courbette (where the horse raises itself up and then hops forward on its hindlegs), and the capriole (where the horse leaps into the air and strikes out with both rear and forelegs into full extension).

Figure 8.25: The use of du Pulvinel's pillars for dressage training at the Riding Academy in Lisbon, Portugal.
(http://www.horsemagazine.com/BREEDINGBARN/BreedingArticles/Hector_Chris/Portugal/Part%201/PiaffePillar2.jpg)

These were all maneuvers designed to either elevate its rider so the military action could be better seen or to actually defend the cavalry rider from being overwhelmed by infantry. The pillars are still used ubiquitously in haute école (the highest school) dressage. The persuasiveness and eloquence of Pulvinel’s exhortations opened not only the eyes of a King but an entire age to the assertion that natural horsemanship offered not only a more humane but a more productive way to train horses. Never again, after Pulvinel, could the world assert it did not know better.

William Cavendish, the Duke of Newcastle, was born in 1592. He was a vain, aristocratic man but one who, by contemporary accounts, was a dashing rider. Cavendish
served as a cavalry officer under both English Kings Charles I and II. When the royalist forces were defeated by Cromwell at the battle of Winceby on October 11, 1643, Cavendish had to escape into exile in France.

![Image](http://www.lombardmaps.com/cat/prints/dressage/capriole.jpg)

Figure 8.26: An illustration from the famous treaties entitled, *A General System of Horsemanship and All Its Branches*, by William Cavendish, the Duke of Newcastle. It was first published in French in 1658. (http://www.lombardmaps.com/cat/prints/dressage/capriole.jpg)

While there, he became exposed to the work of the French horsemasters, including Pulvinel. In France, Cavendish allied himself with the Prince of Wales, the future Charles II, whose father had been beheaded earlier on January 30, 1649 by Cromwell’s Parliament. Cavendish then founded a riding school in Antwerp, Belgium, where he wrote a treatise called *A General System of Horsemanship* (see Figure 8.26). First published in French 1658, it was later translated into English in 1743. Cavendish’s first book exudes his own hubris. For example, he wrote: “If this work pleases you, I
shall be thoroughly well satisfied; if not, I shall be content in my own mind, because I know certainly that it is very good, and better than anything that you have had before….”

In 1660, Cavendish’s luck changed. The monarchy reestablished itself in England under Charles II, and Cavendish returned to regain his titles and land. In 1665, he was rewarded by the King with the title of first Duke of Newcastle and in 1667, published his second book: *A New Method and Extraordinary Invention to Dress Horses and Work Them According to Nature*. One of the new methods the Duke introduced is the use of draw reins as a training device and the “shoulder in” exercises on a circle. Cavendish wrote eloquently about how he was able to “…work on the horse’s memory, imagination and judgment…” and exhorted riders to “forgive him [the horse] his faults in the morning so he may well know you have mercy as well as justice.” At the same time, he still advocated the use of oppressive spur work, writing: “The shanks of the spurs should be long, the rowels should have six sharp points. When they are used, the blood should flow freely.” His work had a profound influence on two of the greatest horsemasters of the next generation: François Robichon de la Guérinière and François Baucher.

François de la Guérinière

François de la Guérinière was born in 1688 near Alençon in the Normandy region of France. He trained under his brother Pierre, who served as horsemaster at the riding academy in Caen—originally established by Pulvinel in 1594. François would, however, surpass his brother. He was appointed Director of the *Menège des Tuileries* in 1730 and then, later, became the Horsemaster to His Majesty, Louis XIV—a position he maintained until his death in 1751. De la Guérinière—sometimes referred to as “the Patron Saint of Dressage”-- developed a series of drills (see Figure 8.27) to teach horses
to yield the shoulder and “toe in” with the forequarters as a way of softening the flank
and neck, a technique he readily attributed to the Duke of Newcastle.

Figure 8.27: A print from de la Guérinière's famous textbook, Ecole de la Cavalerie
(School of Cavalry), published in 1733. This illustration shows the famous maneuver
that de la Guérinière championed to teach horses to yield the forehand, a maneuver that
the famous 20th century horsemaster, Nuno Oliveira called, "the aspirin of
horsebackriding." (http://www.klassisch-reiten.at/DE/t1_islandpferde_gueriniere.jpg)

De la Guérinière’s methods produced a horse that was not only light but endowed
with vertical flexion for dressage. Nuño Olivera, the twentieth-century Portuguese master
horseman and clinician of classical dressage, wrote of the “shoulder-in” maneuvers
popularized by de la Guérinière: “It’s the aspirin of horseback riding; it cures
everything."

De la Guérinière’s book, Ecole de la Cavalerie, was published in 1733 and
continues to serve as the inspiration and foundation for training horses in the famed
Spanish riding School in Vienna, founded in 1572. De la Guérinière is credited with being the first horsemaster to train horses to consistently perform flying lead changes and counter leads at the canter. He also rejected the large, heavy saddles that had come down through the Middle Ages and instead advocated a lighter, smaller saddle—the precursor of today’s dressage saddle—because it permitted better and lighter positioning of the legs along the horse’s flanks. De la Guérinière felt that "the knowledge of the nature of a horse is one of the first foundations of the art of riding it, and every horseman must make it his principal study."

François Baucher

Figure 8.28: Oil painting portrait of François Baucher. (http://pagesperso-orange.fr/saumur-jadis/recit/ch37/baucher.jpg)

François Baucher (see Figure 8.28) was another legendary horsemaster from France. He was born in 1796 and became renowned for his methods, which supposedly
turned out finished dressage horse in record time. In 1842, his book *Methode d’Equitation Basée Sur de Nouveaux Principes* (Method of Horseback Riding Based on New Principles) was published. More than a dozen editions were published over the next century and a half. Baucher’s methods (called “L’effect d’ensemble,” the “effect of the whole”) relied on a balance of forces between impulsion from the spur and collection from the bit (the Baucher is a type of bit named in his honor). Many critics of Baucher’s methods felt his training method yielded a duller, less impulsive horse. On the other hand, when one reads Baucher, one cannot help but be impressed by the thoroughness of his methodology, insisting the hind and front legs be pulled closer together to elevate the horse. He maintained that all training be first carried out at the walk (what he referred to as “the mother of all gaits”) before it could be successfully applied to any faster gaits. Charles de Kunffy, a Hungarian classical horseman of the twentieth century said, borrowing from Baucher: “Speed is the enemy of impulsion.”

A variant on classical horsemanship was embodied in the carefully timed and executed maneuvers perfected by an eighteenth-century Portuguese nobleman Dom Pedro Alcántara e Meneses, the fourth Marquis of Marialva. The Marquis outlined a series of complex maneuvers employed for the Portuguese style of bullfighting (see Figure 8.29). This required great collection and power in the horse’s hindquarters. Contry to the better known Spanish bullfighting, where the matador is on foot and ends the contest of courage and skill by killing the bull, the Portuguese format serves merely as a demonstration of the skill and coordination of horse and rider as they move about the bull—and the bull is spared. To this day, the Portuguese art of equestrian bullfighting is carried out in elegant eighteenth-century costume, complete with feathered cap, and
harkens back to the de Marialva’s evocation of the tourada—a demonstration of a nobleman’s equestrian and courtly skills.

Figure 8.29: Contrary to Spanish bullfighting, Portuguese bullfighting is conducted on horseback. The Marquis of Marialva developed a set of collection exercises for dressage based on building up the requisite hindquarter strength and maneuverability required for this dangerous style of bullfighting.

(https://media-2.web.britannica.com/eb-media/75/81875-050-CBD02EE7.jpg)

Another notable horseman of the eighteenth century was Charles Mercier Dupaty, the Marquis de Clam, born in 1744. Like de la Guérinière, DuPaty trained as a horseman at the school in Caen. His teacher, M. de la Pleignière, employed an anatomical equine skeleton to teach his students about the musculoskeletal interactions between horse and rider while executing dressage maneuvers. Dupaty, like most young men of his age, was well schooled in Greek and carried out a translation of Xenophon’s work (which he called “one of the most beautiful monuments on horsemanship that the Ancients have left us”) into contemporary French. Of Xenophon, Dupaty wrote: “He used the exact sciences and the natural sciences to demonstrate how well founded his equestrian theories were.
Geometry, anatomy and mechanics give us the first rules of horsemanship. Nobody in his right mind can doubt their validity. It is much wiser to take the known sciences as a guide, rather than merely following one's whims."\(^{19}\)

![Image of rider on horse](http://nicholnl.wcp.muohio.edu/DingosBreakfastClub/BioMech/BioMechSeatHistory.html)

Figure 8.30: Illustration from De Clam's work on equitation depicting a naked rider to emphasize the importance of the rider's center of gravity with respect to the horse, saddle, and girth.

After serving in the ranks of the dashing Muskateers, Dupaty returned to his birthplace of La Rochelle and authored several treatises. In *La Science et l'art de*

\(^{19}\) Cited in [www.clampett.net/story/du пати_de_clam/du пати_de_clam.doc](http://www.clampett.net/story/du пати_de_clam/du пати_de_clam.doc)
DuPaty emphasized the natural components of horsemanship (see Figure 8.30) being based upon the physiology of a horse’s anatomy. He disagreed with some of de la Guérinière’s notions of excessive working of the shoulder and hindquarters in tight circles. Unfortunately, Dupaty died prematurely at the age of 38, but not before securing a place in the history of dressage training.

Louis Seeger

Figure 8.31: Photo of Louis Seeger (1798-1865), considered the Father of the German school of classical dressage.

(www.grand-ecuyer.de/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/gustav_steinbrecht_2.jpg)

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During the course of the nineteenth century, Louis Seeger (1798-1865) became the leader of an emerging German school of classical horsemanship. He was highly influenced by de la Guérinière’s writings.\(^{21}\) In 1844, his first book, entitled *System der Reitkunst* ("System of the Art of Riding") was published. Seeger (see Figure 8.30) established the first private riding academy in Berlin.

Gustav Steinbrecht was one of the many illustrious students who attended there. Steinbrecht first studied veterinary medicine before apprenticing himself to Seeger for eight years, after which he eventually became the Director of the “Seegerhof” Riding Academy, a position he held until his death in 1885. He wrote *The Gymnasium of the Horse*, a book notable for some of the tenderness expressed by Steinbrecht:

> The noble horse is not only the animal most suited for riding, it is also the creature with the most versatile talents in the entire animal kingdom. From time immemorial, the horse has been, and still is, the animal for which the young boy feels the greatest love and which the man holds in the highest esteem. Poets and songsters have always sung the praises of the horse, and not without reason: it has faithfully shared humanity’s fate, has participated in all great events recounted in history with active and courageous spirit, has followed man to the remotest corners of the earth, and has shared with him all hardships and privations. In peacetime and prosperity, it is the most precious luxury item; on the hunt, it is a cheerful companion to man, carrying its rider over hill and dale, across hedges and ditches, dependably catching up with any prey, even the fleetest, with the speed of the wind; in combat, it is the faithful friend and servant of the warrior with whom it willingly shares danger and toil.\(^{22}\)

\(^{21}\) This was followed by the publication of *Herr Baucher und seine Kuenste* ("Monsieur Baucher and his Methods") and *Ein ernstes Wort an Deutschlands Reiter* ("An Honest Word to Germany's riders") in 1852.

James Fillis was born in 1834 and was considered a prominent horsemen and *haute école* riders of his day. He apprenticed under Baucher and, during a riding career that spanned more than sixty years, served as Head Ecuyer to the St. Petersburg Cavalry Riding School under Tsar Alexander I. He wrote *Breaking and Riding: with Military Commentaries*. In it, Fillis described his techniques for training on the ground using lunge work. He insisted on an equilibrium between handling and impulsion. He felt a horse must be “correctly balanced and light in forward movements and propulsion, in order that the rider may obtain the most powerful effects with the least exertion.” Fillis was world famous during his lifetime; he developed a spectacular backward, three-legged canter (see Figure 8.32) and a light, durable stirrup (now called the Fillis stirrup), which is still widely used today.

**A Trio of Twentieth-Century Icons: Podhajsky, Olivera, & Bürger**

Although there are a host of talented, famous classical horsemen and women in the twentieth century, three have become modern icons: Alois Podhajsky of Austria, Nuño Oliveira of Portugal, and Udo Bürger of Germany.
Alois Podhajsky (see Figure 8.33), born in 1890, served as an officer in the Austrian Army and was Director of the Spanish Riding School in Vienna from the beginning of World War II until 1965. As an equestrian, Podhajsky won an Olympic medal for Austria and became close friends with General George S. Patton. At the close of the war, Podhajsky was anxious because the Russian Army was advancing closer to the Piber Stud in Czechoslovakia. Housed at that facility were more than two hundred Lipizzan stallions, mares, and foals—the result and genetic repository of over four hundred years of careful breeding. Colonel Podhajsky feared the horses might be slaughtered to feed the Soviet soldiers. He implored Patton to save the great breed from annihilation. The General was eventually persuaded to send tanks to escort the horses out of harm’s way23 and put them under the protection of the American Army. They returned to their home in the Habsburg Palace in the heart of Vienna a decade later.

Figure 8.33: Photograph of Alois Podhajsky, the famous director of the Spanish Riding School in Vienna, Austria from World War II until 1965. He won an Olympic medal in individual dressage in 1936. (http://pics.librarything.com/picsizes/0f/0b/0f0b60e7aef389d636e4c7841514331414f6744.jpg)

23 The rescue of the Lipizzans from the Piber Stud during World War II was immortalized in the 1963 Walt Disney film “The White Stallions.”
Podhajsky wrote several books summarizing not only the history of the Lipizzan horses but also his vast training experience as Director of the most prestigious of all classical dressage schools. His most famous tome is entitled *The Complete Training of Horse and Rider*. Podharsky combined rigorous personal discipline with a disarmingly kind and casual nature with his horses. Known for always coming around the stables with a sugar cube or sweet treat in his pocket, Podhajsky was harsh with anyone who sought a shortcut by which to seemingly train a horse in less time. He wrote: "A ruthlessly condensed training only leads to a general superficiality, to travesties of the movements, and to a premature unsoundness of the horse. Nature cannot be violated."24

Figure 8.34: Photograph of the great Nuño Oliveira, considered to be one of the greatest classical riders of all time. (http://static.blogstorage.hipipi.com/photos/nunooliveira.artblog.fr/images/gd/1179822685/_jpg)

Nuño Oliveira was born in 1924 and died in 1987. He was considered not only one of the great *haute école* dressage trainers of all time, but one of the most graceful, classical riders of the twentieth century. Oliveira (see Figure 8.34) trained under the

tutelage of the Director of the Portuguese Royal School, Mestre Miranda, the last riding master of the royal family in the Palácio des Necessidades. Miranda died in 1940.

Oliveira, grief-stricken at the loss of his master, wrote: “Of the master’s horsemanship, I remember perfectly his great discipline and the calmness and perfect submission of his horses. He was very strict. All his horses went out to do the *haute écoble* airs that they knew. The changes of step were brilliant and the fluidity of their gallop immense. The passages were excellent, with great suspension times.”

Oliveira became the Director of the Riding School in Lisbon before eventually opening his own riding academy in Avessada. He served as the spokesman for not just one country’s heritage of classical horsemanship but all of Europe and, one could argue, an entire civilization. Oliveira evoked what many of his predecessors understood: the pursuit of horsemanship ultimately called for the cultivation of the human spirit. “It is rare,” Oliveira wrote in his Introduction to *Reflections on Equestrian Art*, “to see a rider who is truly passionate about the horse and his training, taking profound interest in dressage with self-abnegation, and making this extraordinarily subtle work one of the dominant motivation of his life.”

Contemporaneous with Oliveira’s “Iberian” prominence was the German horseman, Udo Bürger. Trained as a veterinarian and a lifelong student of animal psychology and ethology, he wrote *The Way to Perfect Horsemanship* in 1959. Bürger grounded the classical training techniques upon basic concepts of anatomy. He emphasized the relationship between the movements of a horse’s head and neck, the

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25 Cited in http://www.horsemagazine.com/ARTICLES/H/Hector,%20Chris/Portugal/Part%201/Part%201.html
vector of forces applied through reins, and the inflexion applied through the rider’s seat and legs. He believed theoretical knowledge was an essential ingredient to being able to create fluidity and harmony between horse and rider.

The Vaquero Tradition

![Figure 8.35: Early 19th century of a typical vaquero or cowboy.](http://historicparks.org/imagegallery/misc/images/vaquero_jpg.jpg)

The Californeo Heritage

The vaquero (derived from the Spanish word vaca for “cow”) was born out of Spain’s colonial efforts in the New World and the extensive land grants provided for the raising of cattle in New Spain. Alta California was created as a Spanish outpost in 1769 and annexed into the territory of the United States in 1848. In California, the raising of cattle was carried out on smaller spreads but with richer browse and pasture than the sparser lands of New Spain in modern day Texas and Arizona. This meant vaqueros (see Figure 8.35) stayed on the large haciendas where they were born and raised. It permitted
a system of patronage-supported centers where the vaquero or *Californeo* culture could thrive, much as it had in the European classical tradition.

Vaqueros often created regional contests of skill, competing against each other. One competition, for example, required contestants to detach their reins from the bit in the horse’s mouth. They would pluck six hairs from their mounts’ tails and use three hairs to link the reins on each side back to the bit. The horsemen would then gallop at full speed until they came to a designated marker, where they would pull their horses up to a full stop. Judges would then come up and count the number of hairs still intact between the bit and the reins. The rider who had exerted the least pressure on the bit and could show the largest number of intact, undamaged hairs would be declared champion. The vaqueros demonstrated great finesse in the maneuvers of their horses while focusing on moving and roping their cattle.

Figure 8.36: Photograph of Richard Caldwell, one of the great advocates of teaching traditional *vaquero* horsemanship, demonstrating the trademark relaxed poll and loose rein that is the hallmark of the *vaquero* school.

(https://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://www.oldcaliforniareataroping.com/Clinics/IMAG031.JPG&imgrefurl=http://www.oldcaliforniareataroping.com/Clinics.html&usg=__Phsc4Mgp7eOjWpWgyE-5tiFEcF0=&h=175&w=300&sz=14&hl=en&start=87&um=1&itbs=1&tbm=isch&source=mm&client=chromebuddy&client=ms&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi-A7sp5lsTAhXOJm8KHWihCZcQ_AUICjgE&ei=7J3tW5rjOJpJtkbKpkO4Dg&docid=5kX3GIQpYxn3bM&partner=gogle&ndsp=21&ved=0ahUKEwi-A7sp5lsTAhXOJm8KHWihCZcQ_AUICjgE&docid=5kX3GIQpYxn3bM&hl=en&safe=off&hl=en&start=87&um=1&itbs=1&tbm=isch&source=mm&client=chromebuddy&client=ms&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi-A7sp5lsTAhXOJm8KHWihCZcQ_AUICjgE&docid=5kX3GIQpYxn3bM&partner=gogle&ndsp=21&ved=0ahUKEwi-A7sp5lsTAhXOJm8KHWihCZcQ_AUICjgE&docid=5kX3GIQpYxn3bM&hl=en&safe=off)
The vaqueros introduced many innovations such as the hackamore bridle, chaps, split reins and more (see Figures 8.36 and 8.37). Still, one must avoid over-romanticizing the image of the Californeo horseman. Cruel methods were often employed, such as snubbing horses to posts or tying them to drags until they had struggled to physical collapse. When the horse was too exhausted to mount any further protest, the saddle would be cinched up, and the rider would get his leg up and over. The horse would buck as long as it could. If the rider stayed astride, the horse was “broken.” Many horses were culled from completely wild herds of mustangs. Taking a horse from such an undomesticated state, without the benefit of royal patrons and riding academies, often meant that horsemen on the American frontier resorted to methods of physical dominance and abuse in the name of expediency. It is unclear exactly where and how “natural” techniques began to make their way into the Western school of horsemanship but, by the
end of the twentieth century, they gradually came to dominate almost all schools of Western horse training.

Tom Dorrance

Figure 8.38: Tom Dorrance, often called the horses's advocate. He began the natural horsemanship movement through several dedicated students, including Ray Hunt. (http://www.buckingv.com/tomdorrance.jpg)

If there is one man who can be said to have started the revolution toward natural horsemanship in the world of Western riding it is Tom Dorrance. Dorrance (see Figure 8.38) was born on a small cattle ranch in Oregon in 1910. Robert Miller said: “he [Dorrance] referred to problems with horses as ‘people problems’ and jokingly called himself ‘the horse’s lawyer.’” But Dorrance was deadly serious in his advocacy of the horse’s point of view. When his friend and student, Ray Hunt, asked him where he learned what he knew about horses, Dorrance was quick to give credit to his teacher. “Ray,” he replied, “I learned it from the horse.”

26Robert Miller & Rick Lamb, *The Revolution in Horsemanship*, p. 27]
In 1987, Dorrance authored *True Unity: Willing Communication Between Horse and Human*. The book emphasized some of the tenets of natural horsemanship: make the horse think it is his idea to do things. Always try to be as gentle and patient as you can be. A good rider tries to stay out of the horse’s way and not constrain its movements.

Ray Hunt, Monty Roberts, & John Lyons: America’s First Generation of Natural Horsemen

Ray Hunt (see Figure 8.39) apprenticed himself to Tom Dorrance and went on to train well over ten thousand horses. He held clinics until his death in 2009. Ray became the “great disseminator” of natural horsemanship, combining his own ideas with the precepts he acquired from the Dorrance brothers. Some of Ray’s students include Pat Parelli, Craig Cameron, Bryan Neubert, and Buck Brannaman. Two others have also forged parallel careers alongside Ray Hunt’s; namely, Monty Roberts and John Lyons.

Figure 8.39: Ray Hunt became the father of the natural horsemanship movement in North America. A list of his students reads like a "Who's Who" in the world of horsemanship training. (http://bridlebit.files.wordpress.com/2009/03/rayhunt12.jpg)
Figure 8.40: Monty Roberts not only discovered the nonverbal language of horses, *Equus*, but realized it could be transformed into values shared not only between horses but with humans as well.

Figure 8.41: John Lyons developed a practical and easy to follow approach for ground and saddle work with horses.
(http://www.instridehorsemanship.com/pages/images/stories/john%20lyons.jpg)
Monty Roberts

Monty Roberts (see Figure 8.40) used his own experiences as a teenager observing mustangs in the wild to derive principles of horsemanship and training based upon horse’s natural behaviors and body language. Lyons (see Figure 8.41), on the other hand, developed a systematic approach of horse training methods accessible to anyone, regardless of skill level or experience. It is a testament to these trainers that they have consistently shown the techniques they employ will work with any horse and in virtually anyone’s hands. Many of them like Pat Parelli (see Figure 8.42) have publicly demonstrated that even horses immediately captured from the wild, as well as donkeys, mules, and even zebras will respond to natural techniques based upon understanding equine behavior and communication rather than physical intimidation.
We will never know the identity of the first human who took a chance, a great intuitive leap, by approaching the horse as a potential partner rather than merely prey. As we reviewed the history of equitation, a succession of remarkable individuals emerge because of the empathy and respect for horses they expressed. All the greater their achievements because the positions they advocated were often controversial and ran against the prevalent utilitarian attitudes of their own times that saw horses as beasts of burden.

There are significant parallels in the history of human rights. It too has seen a slow, inevitable evolution from an egocentric position, where the notion of one individual or class or race having inherent supremacy and dominion over another, has ceded way to a more communal vision. With this shift from a left hemispheric point of view to a right brain perspective, humanity’s mores have also undergone dramatic transformation. Where slavery was once almost universally justified by religion and endorsed by nations, it is now condemned and criminalized by a civilization where global protection of human freedom can be envisioned. With this shift in our intra-species awareness, there has also been quantum leap in inter-species insight. The twentieth century is a turning point in the relationship between horses and humans. Not only did we enter the first century where, in most of the First World, the horse ceased to function as a primary means of transportation but where cruelty is no longer condoned or forgiven in the name of expediency. The use of natural horsemanship training techniques has provided a far happier, responsive, and willing partner than has ever seen with the earlier, harsher methods employed to intimidate and subjugate the horse.
It has taken millennia for humanity to repeatedly learn the lesson that “respect for life,” as Nobel Peace Prize laureate Albert Schweitzer (see Figure 8.43) called it, can become an organizing principle to govern our interactions with each other and with all the other species and life forms in our Universe. By doing so, the cosmos smiles back at us. The language of love is indeed universal.

Figure 8.43: Dr. Albert Schweitzer, who won the Nobel Peace Prize for his doctrine of Reverence for Life wrote: "By having a reverence for life, we enter into a spiritual relation with the world. By practicing reverence for life, we become good, deep, and alive." (http://inmed.us/images/albert_schweitzer_writing.jpg)