

Portuguese School
of Equestrian Art

The Enlightened and Noble Art of Cavalry

THE TREATISE BY MANOEL CARLOS D'ANDRADE

EQUESTRIAN GALA



Parques de Sintra

Marked by the Enlightenment, the 18th century was one of major reforms, especially cultural ones, across Europe. In Portugal, it was during the reign of King João V (1689 – 1750) that culture underwent a profound renewal, which continued into the reign of King José I (1714 – 1777) under the strong influence of the Marquis of Pombal.

It was in this context that, in 1790, Manoel Carlos d'Andrade published the treatise “Luz da Liberal e Nobre Arte da Cavallaria”, the most important equestrian treatise in Portugal.

“And since, among everyone, the regular movement of the Horses and their practicalities are much to the admiration of the mortals, I will write about this, and I will discuss this Liberal and Noble Art that I propose, commonly called Horse Riding, in which I will follow the lesson from one of the best Authors I have dealt with, and I will say without hesitation what seems to me to be more in line with reason, and it is true, because I prefer to be right alone than to be wrong in company.”¹

The first equestrian treatise in Portugal belongs, however, to king Duarte I (1391 – 1438) and dates from the 15th century. This book, “Livro da Ensinança de Bem Cavalgar toda a Sella” (“The Art of Riding on Every Saddle”) remained forgotten until the first half of the 19th century, when it was finally recognised at the National Library of Paris. Back then, it was common practice for the great Portuguese masters to leave behind their vision of the riding practised in Portugal as a legacy. Considered an art form, technique, philosophy, inspiration and aesthetics were required in its practice. Combined with great sensitivity, horse riding has always fascinated emperors, kings and nobles throughout the world, with the horse having played a decisive role in the course of its history. With horses, battles were won, peoples were united and minds were broadened.

Legend has it – because all great stories are based on a legend – that unique horses, full of talent and nobility, ran across the fields in Portugal. These fearless animals were nicknamed “Children of the Wind”, agile horses endowed with courage, whose mares would be fertilised by the wind, producing extremely fast colts. The peoples in the southwest of the Iberian Peninsula were known for a different style of riding, in which the stirrups were shorter, a style that would come to be called “gineta” and which was performed with the lighter type of horse that was used in the region during battles. This form of riding created a strong bond between horse and rider that endures to this day.

Throughout European history, both horses and riding evolved according to needs and uses, as shown by prints, statues and various treatises written by different authors, some of them Portuguese. In particular, the shorter or longer stirrup, along with different saddles and accessories, gave rise to more agile riding in the south of the Iberian Peninsula, and the style most practised in the rest of Europe, using longer stirrups.

The Portuguese School of Equestrian Art, founded in 1979, aims to recover the golden and opulent period of the 18th century Royal Riding School of the Portuguese court, the “Picaria Real”. With over forty years of experience, it is keen to exhibit Portuguese History through traditional horses, costumes and harnesses. Portuguese-style saddles, preserved until today through the tradition of horseback bullfighting, the horse breastplate adorned with the crest and coat of arms of the founding King of the Alter Stud Farm, the badger skin saddle cloth protecting the kidneys, the head gear’s unique characteristics, as well as the ribbons in the School’s signature yellow and white colours, which adorn the distinctly Portuguese braids, are some examples of this legacy handed down from one generation to the next. In order to spur the memory, the Alter Stud Farm, based in Alter do Chão,

presented four horses to the four founders of the School – José Athayde, Guilherme Borba, Filipe Graciosa and Francisco Cancellata de Abreu – with which they were given the opportunity to showcase the wonderful Alter Lusitano Horse and its history to the world.

As part of the group of four great European academies that practice this type of riding, the School's mission is to disseminate Portuguese equestrian art, being the institution that most faithfully follows a founding treatise on riding. The ideas of Manoel Carlos d'Andrade's treatise are adopted by the School as the primary manual for the behaviour and development of the rider, for the training and teaching of horses, the practice of riding and the implementation of most figures presented to the public, in Portugal and abroad, with a view to reconstituting the former "Picaria Real".



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The Free Horse



In 1748, King João V founded the Alter Stud Farm, “the oldest stud farm in the world to still exist in the same location”². Moved by love and courtesy to his wife, Maria Anna of Austria, and a genuine interest in horse riding, and deeming equestrian production in Portugal to be sub-standard – taking into account the equestrian academies that were present in other European courts during that period – the king decided to acquire some mares from King Felipe V of Spain to enrich the genetic lineage of these animals in Portugal. The horses that came from the Alter Stud Farm thus became part of the “Pícaria Real”, being used in the most diverse ways by the Portuguese court, including for pomp, parties and other ceremonies, much of which was held in the former “Picadeiro Real de Belém”, the Royal Riding Ring, built in 1793, today known as the National Coach Museum.

As in any stud farm, the objective was the breeding and development of horses with certain characteristics for the practice of academic riding. The horses bred there had to possess certain traits so that they could better perform their functions, not only as cavalry, but as a faithful representative of the Portuguese nobility: thus, a unique horse was born, with a firm and robust bearing, flexible and with immense courage, which enabled it, and still does, to face adversity without hesitation, while at the same time conveying a remarkable elegance: “The Alter horse was not only a splendid dressage and parade steed, but also a good war horse”³.

Rider-author Manoel Carlos d’Andrade was also not indifferent to the qualities of this beautiful animal. In the first chapter of his treatise, he extols all the qualities of the Lusitano Horse, even using them to justify their suitability for equestrian practice at the time. Its courage and nobility are exalted, always ready for battle. “Full of rage, it kicks up the earth with more fury than a lion, and it knows war from afar through preparation and enemy voices (...)”⁴. Even today, the Alter Stud Farm seeks – as far as possible – to preserve the genetic lineage by pairing the mare with stallions with the aptitude for the equestrian art. Despite the development that has taken place within the discipline of animal breeding, and the constant contact with humans, today the foals remain in the field for their first three years until they are able to start their journey with the riders.

The Carousel of Young Horses



Following the birth of the foals, Manoel Carlos d'Andrade reinforces the importance, in his treatise, of their development in the training phase, not only physically, but also psychologically. Only by following his advice can the “picadores” (as riders are called) appreciate all of the qualities found in these horses. There is even a tradition in their first contact with the rider, their familiarisation with the riding ring and harnesses and allocation:

“The first time that the Colts enter the Ring to start them getting accustomed to the leash, the Master will take a coin, which bares the King’s portrait; and giving it to his first Assistant, he will throw it in the air; if the coin lands with the portrait facing up, that Colt belongs to that Rider to train it, and to work with it; [...]”⁵

Nowadays, the Portuguese School of Equestrian Art chooses horses from the Alter Stud Farm at the age of four to start their training. They are selected by the “Mestre Picador” or Master-Chief Rider, the most senior figure among the “picadores”. According to Manoel Carlos d’Andrade, this figure was personified, in the 18th century, by the Marquis of Marialva, synonymous with equestrian culture in Portugal.

Training begins with the natural gaits of a horse: walking, trotting, cantering, learning to balance and feeling the weight of the rider and, only later are the more complex exercises introduced. In training a horse, each gesture has to be performed lightly, nurturing patience, striving for perfection. This first phase is called the “Basse École”, horse and rider subsequently graduating to more elaborate exercises, which are exhibited in the most beautiful and spectacular movements of the “Haute École”.



The Picaria Real



In a natural development after subtly training the horse in the art of the “Basse École”, comes the “ex-libris” of the Portuguese School of Equestrian Art – the “Picaria Real” – and “The way is shown, the reason why they should be taught, and how to arrange the Horses between the Pylons, to train them in the lessons of the airs above the ground”⁶. In this set of exercises we find horses performing high-precision and difficult movements, with particular dexterity, in a synthesis of Portuguese riding. The school has always dedicated itself to the same type of horse, specifically bred for the art of war, for big game hunting and for bullfighting, full of dexterity, attack and defence skills.

So what does “Picaria Real” mean? It is the Haute École academic practice that performs exercises that also seek to preserve the natural attitudes of wild horses, thus taking advantage of their greatest abilities. And what better way to showcase them to the world if not through a show revealing the splendour of 18th century Portuguese court?



At the Portuguese School of Equestrian Art, “Pícaria Real” is the name we give to the recreation of the atmosphere that existed in the arena of the Portuguese court during the period from the end of the reign of King João V in 1750 until the departure of the royal family for Brazil in 1807.

Pas-de-deux, trois and quatre

“Pas-de-deux”, “trois” and “quatre” (or Steps of two, three and four) is the presentation of the horses in a ballet in which the animals “dance” in groups of 2, 3 and 4. With the execution of highly demanding exercises, such as flying changes (approximate and in time), canter pirouettes, passage and piaffe, this is an advanced level of riding.



Long Reins

When horses reach a very high level of training, the ballet they perform in “pas-de-deux”, “trois” and “quatre” is now executed with the rider on foot, who follows and leads the horse with long reins. This is a quintessential expression of rare equestrian knowledge and trust between two beings.



Airs above the ground

In this number, we can observe wooden pylons and platforms in the riding ring. According to the prints in the treatise by Manoel Carlos d'Andrade, the pylons served to improve the horses' flexibility and concentration. The pylons of the Portuguese School of Equestrian Art are adorned with the coat of arms of King João V on their sides, in a reminder of such an important tradition that endures until today. The wooden platforms serve to amplify the sound of the horses' hooves, helping the rider to find the right cadence for the piaffe and the “terre-à-terre”.

In a natural development of gait transition exercises, such as the piaffe and the terre-à-terre, the horse then proceeds to the airs above the ground with more demanding exercises, such as the levades, the pesades, the courbettes, the ballotades and the caprioles.



Court Games



“This is how tournaments are organised, and other amusements suitable for training Horses in the Art of War, and in the method of handling weapons.”⁷

The Court Games are recreated by the Portuguese School of Equestrian Art in an invocation of the tournaments and games presented to the court, in which the riders would demonstrate their equestrian skills.

Following the lines of Manoel Carlos d’Andrade’s treatise, the Court Games presented by the School – the quintain, the medusa game, the game of heads and tilting at the ring – demonstrate dexterity and skills in equestrian competition, the colours of the riders matching with the saddle cloths and the ribbons on the horses’ manes, as well as the accessories used.

Marquis of Marialva - Solo



In this number alluding to the 4th Marquis of Marialva, the “Estribeiro-Mor”, or “Intendant-General of the Picaria Real” and the highest benchmark for Portuguese equestrian art, the horse is presented in the final stage of its training. In a great instance of culmination of the equestrian art in Portugal, the horse is led by the reins of the bridle, demonstrating the maximum degree of training and the mastery of its rider.

The Carousel



The Carousel is the grand finale of royal presentations at European courts, and its pomp and pageantry the most awaited moment in the School's presentations. Held since its foundation, it represents the ultimate link with the old "Pícaria Real".

The Portuguese School of Equestrian Art aims to preserve and promote a notable equestrian past, using Manoel Carlos d'Andrade's treatise as its main source of inspiration and committing itself to conveying its equestrian identity to future generations.

Bibliographic notes

¹ D'Andrade, Carlos Manoel, "Luz da Liberal e Nobre Arte da Cavallaria", facsimile edition, Lisbon 1997, p. 1

² Monteiro, Hemetério, "As Reais Manadas de Alter do Chão (Coudelaria de Alter) ao longo da História", Booksfactory, 2018, p.8

³ "Idem, ibidem", p. 34

⁴ Andrade, Manoel Carlos d', "ibidem", p. 2

⁵ "Idem, ibidem", p. 17

⁶ "Idem, ibidem", p. 394

⁷ "Idem, ibidem", p. 411

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