

# The Book of Horsemanship

BY DUARTE I OF PORTUGAL

TRANSLATED BY JEFFREY L. FORGENG



*The Book of  
Horsemanship*

By Duarte I of Portugal

## Armour and Weapons

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Horsemanship*

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# Introduction

I would have our Courtier be a perfect horseman in every kind of saddle; and in addition to knowing about horses and what pertains to a horseman, let him put every effort and diligence into surpassing others a little in everything. ... As it is the peculiar excellence of the Italians to ride well in the brida style, to practice manège skillfully, especially with challenging horses, to tilt and joust, let him be among the best of the Italians in this. In tourneying, conducting a deed of arms, fighting at the barriers, let him be among the best of the French. In cane games, bullfighting, throwing spears and javelins, let him be outstanding among the Spaniards.

—Baldesar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, Book I ch. 21<sup>1</sup>

In 1804, the Portuguese abbot, diplomat, and scholar José Correia da Serra was residing in Paris, having been obliged two years earlier to resign from his position at the Portuguese embassy in London owing to conflicts with the ambassador. Taking advantage of the opportunity to visit the Bibliothèque Nationale—formerly the French Royal Library, now owned by the nation in Napoleonic France—Correia da Serra came upon a four hundred-year old manuscript from his native land. It turned out to consist of two works by Duarte I of Portugal (r. 1433–1438), *Leal Conselheiro* (“the Faithful Counselor”) and the *Livro do Cavalgar* (“Book on Riding”).<sup>2</sup> Duarte was known to Portuguese historians as a scholarly monarch, but until this time his reputation rested heavily on references in medieval Portuguese

<sup>1</sup> Castiglione, *Il Cortegiano*, fols 17v–18r.

<sup>2</sup> The manuscript does not title the work, but describes it as *o livro da enssynança de bem cavalgar toda sela que fez Elrey dom Eduarte* (“the book of instruction for riding well in every type of saddle written by the king Dom Duarte”). The catalogue of Duarte’s library styles it the *livro do cavalgar que el rey dom Eduarte copilou* (see below, p. 9). *Livro do Cavalgar* may therefore serve as a suitable title, here rendered as *Book of Horsemanship*.

chronicles, since no copy of either of his two major works was known to have survived.

Correia da Serra never publicized his discovery; the manuscript was rediscovered about a decade later, and not until 1843 were its contents finally published. The texts have since been republished several times, but more than two centuries after their discovery, neither one has been made available in a viable English translation.<sup>3</sup> The lack of attention to Duarte outside of Portugal reflects the underdeveloped state of Portuguese studies in the English-speaking world rather than the merits of his work: Duarte is among the most strikingly original authors of the Middle Ages, and had these works been composed by a Spanish or French monarch, they would assuredly be quite familiar to English-speaking scholars.

Students of medieval chivalric culture have reason to be thankful that Duarte turned his sharp intellect to the subject of horsemanship. Modern imagination may associate knights chiefly with swords and armor, but contemporaries knew that the horse was at least as important in the material culture of chivalry. In most western European languages, the word for “knight” is some variant on “horseman”, and boys of knightly class trained on horseback years before they were ready to bear arms. As the thirteenth-century veterinary author Jordanus Ruffus expresses it, “The horse separates princes, magnates, and knights from lesser people, and no lord can fittingly be seen among ordinary people except through the mediation of a horse.”<sup>4</sup> Yet technical documentation of the equestrian arts of the medieval knight is almost entirely lacking. Prior to Duarte, the only work on the subject in the western tradition is the treatise by Xenophon, composed around the mid-300s B.C.E. A bit more than a century after Duarte, Federico Grisone published his highly influential work on the topic; only after Grisone does material on the subject become plentiful. Duarte stands as the sole medieval writer to provide extensive documentation on what might be considered a knight’s most fundamental professional skill—and in terms that still had relevance a hundred years later, as witnessed by Castiglione’s recommendations in *The Courtier*.

<sup>3</sup> See below, The Translation, on editions and translations of the *Livro do Cavalgar*.

<sup>4</sup> *Jordani Ruffi Calabriensis Hippiaatria*, p. 1.

## Duarte I

Eduarte I of Portugal (Duarte as he is known in modern Portuguese) was born on 31 October 1391, the second son of João I (1358–1433), founder of the house of Avis that would rule Portugal until 1580. João, a bastard son of Pedro I (r. 1357–1367), was chosen for the throne in 1385 by the Portuguese *cortes* (parliament) after a two-year crisis at the death of João's half-brother Fernando I (r. 1367–1383). The rival claimant was Fernando's sister Beatriz: since she was married to Juan I of Castile, her succession would have meant the end of Portugal as an independent kingdom. Shortly after his accession, João defeated an invading force from Castile with the aid of allied English troops; in 1387, he consolidated his alliance with Richard II of England by marrying Philippa of Lancaster (1359–1415), the daughter of Richard's uncle John of Gaunt. The couple's first son, Afonso, was born in 1390, but died in childhood. Their second son, Duarte, was named after Philippa's grandfather, Edward III of England. Duarte's younger brothers were Pedro (b. 1392), Enrique (b. 1394), João (b. 1400), and Fernando (b. 1402); he also had a sister Isabella (b. 1397), as well as an illegitimate half-brother Afonso (b. 1377) and half-sister Beatriz (b. c. 1386).<sup>5</sup>

Even though Duarte was heir apparent, there is surprisingly little documentation about his first two decades of life. One detail of potential significance to the present work lies in a letter of João I from 1405 mentioning a journey by the princes to England<sup>6</sup>—João does not specify which of his sons were traveling, but the letter may indicate that Duarte visited his mother's homeland at least once, and that his remarks on English riders (III.1 ch. 3), and perhaps those on Irish riders (III.6 ch. 1), were based on experiences abroad.

In 1411, João resolved to undertake an attack on the Moroccan port of Ceuta, at the eastern end of the Strait of Gibraltar. During the following years, as he turned his attention to the preparations for the expedition, he delegated the workings of daily government to

<sup>5</sup> On Duarte's siblings, see Lopes, *Chronica de El-Rei D. João I*, 6.85–87.

<sup>6</sup> Dinis, *Monumenta Henricina*, 1.311.

Duarte.<sup>7</sup> The burdens of state proved overwhelming for the young prince, who sank into a paralyzing depression for the next three years. In *Leal Condeilhero* Duarte offers a remarkable narrative and analysis of his depression, applying to it much of the same freshness of insight that makes his *Livro do Cavalgar* speak across the centuries:

**Chapter 19: How I suffered from melancholic humor  
and recovered from it**

Many people have been, are, and in the future will be afflicted with this sin of sadness that arises from the disconcerted will, which these days is usually diagnosed as suffering from melancholic humor; physicians say it can arise in many ways due to diverse causes and feelings. For more than three years I was continually and greatly afflicted by it, and by the special grace of our Lord God I returned to perfect health. In pursuit of the intention I expressed at the outset, to offer people beneficial instruction and guidance from this brief and simple reading, I will describe for you the onset, course, and cure of my ailment, so that my experience can be an example for others. For it is no small comfort and remedy to those who are so afflicted to know that others have felt what they are suffering, and have regained complete health: one of its greatest symptoms is the belief, when you are feeling something so terrible, that you can never return to the good condition you were in before.<sup>8</sup>

The episode may have played an important role in the genesis of the *Livro do Cavalgar*. Duarte attributes the onset of his depression in part to a lack of recreation, especially hunting, and recalls that “sadness began to grow in me, not from any real basis, but from anything that might give it occasion, or from any irrational fantasy”.<sup>9</sup> This analysis of the causes of his depression brings additional meaning to his rationale for the *Livro do Cavalgar*: in the Prologue, Duarte says that one purpose of writing was “to keep my mind from

<sup>7</sup> Gama, *A filosofia da cultura portuguesa*, p. 53; Luis Miguel Duarte, *D. Duarte*, pp. 49, 62.

<sup>8</sup> Duarte, *Leal Condeilhero*, ed. Lopes de Castro and Botelho, p. 73. For the full narrative, see Duarte, *Leal Condeilhero*, pp. 73–83 (chs. 18–25). The episode is also referenced by Zurara, *Tomada de Ceuta*, p. 89.

<sup>9</sup> Duarte, *Leal Condeilhero*, p. 74.

matters that might lead to trouble". Taken together, these passages suggest that the work may have had a place in the author's regime of mental health, offering a vehicle to occupy his mind during idle moments, diverting it from the melancholic thoughts that could lead to depression.

By the time João's fleet was ready to sail in July 1415, the prince had recovered from his depression, and he joined his father and two oldest brothers in the expedition; all three princes took an active part in the fighting. The city fell to the Portuguese on 14 August, an event that marked an important milestone in the establishment of Portugal's global maritime empire. Duarte's experience on this expedition certainly informs his discussion of the role of horsemanship in battle, where he makes particular reference to his father's campaigns (I ch. 1). It may also have influenced his discussion of the riding styles of the Moors (III.1 ch. 7, III.6 ch. 1), though he would also have had occasion to see this at home, where both resident and visiting Moors were a familiar sight.<sup>10</sup>

During the period after Ceuta, the crown prince continued to play an important part in his father's government, but he evidently had sufficient time for a balanced repertoire of physical and intellectual pursuits. In 1421, Alonso de Cartagena, Dean of Santiago de Compostela, arrived from the court of Castile for the first of four diplomatic missions that would eventually culminate in the Peace of Medina del Campo between Castile and Portugal in 1431. Cartagena, who would serve as one of the Castilian delegates to the Council of Basel in the 1430s, was one of Iberia's leading scholars, and he and Duarte appear to have quickly developed a close intellectual bond. Cartagena dedicated to Duarte his *Memoriale Virtutum*, a digest of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* as expounded by Thomas Aquinas, and it is highly probable that Cartagena was personally responsible for the Aristotelian influences that figure so prominently in the *Livro*

<sup>10</sup> On the presence of Moors among the royal stablemasters, see Gomes, *Court Society*, p. 192; on Moorish ambassadors, see Zurara, *Tomada de Ceuta*, p. 105. See also Marques, *Portugal na Crise*, pp. 33–35 on Moors in fifteenth-century Portugal. On Duarte's participation in the fighting at Ceuta, see Zurara, *Tomada de Ceuta*, pp. 196, 203–12, 231–32, 250–53.

*do Cavalgar*.<sup>11</sup> This period also appears to have been the most fruitful for Duarte's own writing, being the likely time for the composition of the *Livro do Cavalgar* and *Leal Conselheiro*, both of which appear to have been composed over a span of years.

As crown prince, Duarte was naturally expected to ensure the continuance of the royal line, though in fact he did not marry until 1428, surprisingly late in life. His wife was Eleanor, daughter of King Ferdinand I of Aragon, and the couple would have nine children during their decade of marriage, though Duarte's first child, João Manuel de Vilhena, was born out of wedlock around 1416. The bond between Duarte and Eleanor seems to have been very real, as evidenced by his dedication of *Leal Conselheiro* to his wife, and the apparent creation of a presentation copy of both of Duarte's major works for her.

In the latter years of João I's reign, the crown prince was playing an increasing role in his father's government, and by the time he acceded to the throne in 1433, Duarte was already an experienced ruler. His actual reign was brief, and was not judged favorably either by contemporaries or subsequent generations, owing to a disastrous attempt to seize Tangier in 1437: the attack failed, and the king's youngest brother was captured, to die in captivity a few years later. Recent scholarship is less inclined to judge Duarte's reign purely by his military record. His administration was diligent and able, both as prince and as king: his legacy included substantial development of the law code as well as currency reform. Perhaps most significantly, he left behind him a nation remarkably stable, in spite of dynastic conflicts in both the preceding and following generations, positioning Portugal to play a global role that no contemporary could have anticipated based on the country's size, population, or wealth.<sup>12</sup>

Duarte succumbed to the plague only a year after Tangier, dying on 9 September 1438. His six-year old son succeeded to the throne

<sup>11</sup> Fallows, "Alfonso de Cartagena", pp. 6–7; Cartagena, *Memorial de Virtudes*, ed. Campos Souto, pp. 15–16, 29–30, 34–35; Gallardo, *Alonso de Cartagena*, pp. 119–25; Salazar, "Impacto Humanístico", pp. 219–24.

<sup>12</sup> For modern interpretations of Duarte, cf. Dionísio, "Recepção de D. Duarte"; Gama, *Filosofia da cultura portuguesa*, pp. 53–54; Russell, *Prince Henry*, 149–50; Marques, *Portugal na Crise*, pp. 548–42. For examples of some of Duarte's governmental work, see Albuquerque and Nunes, *Ordenações del-Rei Dom Duarte*; Marques, *Portugal na Crise*, pp. 211, 281.

as Afonso V. At first the boy ruled under the regency of his mother, but after a period of conflict between Eleanor and her brother-in-law Pedro, she left the country in 1440 to settle in Toledo. The House of Avis would continue to oversee Portugal's emergence onto the world stage, until the death of the last Avis king in 1580 resulted in a period of rule by the kings of Spain until the mid-1600s.<sup>13</sup>

About sixty years after Duarte's death, the Portuguese court historian Rui de Pina described him in terms predictably flattering, but generally consistent with external evidence:

He was an agile man, and well trained in all the good arts that an accomplished prince should possess in field and court, peace and war. He knew how to ride in both brida and jennet saddles better than anyone else in his day; he was very kind to everyone, and well tempered; he prided himself on being a good wrestler in his youth, as indeed he was, and he often practiced with contemporaries who were also good at it; he enjoyed hunting large and small game, although not at the cost of falling behind on necessary business. ... He was a wise man and possessed of a keen intellect, a lover of learning, in which he was very well versed, not so much through attending school, but through ongoing study and reading good books—for his formal studies had been limited to grammar and some logic. He wrote a book of instructions for riders; and he composed another, dedicated to his wife, entitled *Leal Conselheiro*.<sup>14</sup>

Today, Duarte is known to the Portuguese as “the philosopher-king” or “the eloquent”, a reputation that rests largely on his surviving writings. His literary output was exceptional among medieval monarchs, but less so within his immediate family. As Duarte mentions in the present work, his father composed a treatise on hunting, the *Livro da Montaria*, written at some point between 1415 and 1433.<sup>15</sup> João's work is several times the size of Duarte's *Livro do Cavalgar*, but otherwise there are pronounced familial resemblances: João integrates psychological, philosophical and ethical reflections

<sup>13</sup> On Duarte's life and reign, see Luis Miguel Duarte, *D. Duarte*; Rui de Pina, *Crónicas*, 475–575; Zurara, *Tomada de Ceuta*.

<sup>14</sup> Pina, *Crónicas*, pp. 494–95.

<sup>15</sup> João I, *Montaria*, pp. xxii–xxiii.



with extremely precise detail on the equipment, techniques, and strategies of the hunt. His treatise on hunting was almost certainly a major inspiration for his son, as suggested by repeated references to the late king in the *Livro do Cavalgar* (III.5 ch. 11; III.5 ch 14).

Duarte's brother Pedro likewise had a scholarly bent. He commissioned or authored translations of several classical works—Rui de Pina tells us that his translations included the *De Re Militari* by Vegetius and the *De Regimine Principum* by Giles of Rome, both works that are referenced in the *Livro do Cavalgar*. Pedro also collaborated with the priest João Verba in authoring the *Livro da Virtuosa Bemfeitoria*, an analysis of the dynamics and implications of giving and receiving based on Pedro's translation of Seneca's *De Beneficiis*.<sup>16</sup>

Duarte's own literary output was extensive, if fragmented. In addition to the *Livro do Cavalgar*, he left behind a body of poetry, letters, legal texts, and memoranda on topics as diverse as personal biography, translation theory, customs rates, engineering, and household management.<sup>17</sup> Some of these materials found their way into *Leal Conselheiro*, his most substantial work, a compendium whose subject-matter ranges from philosophy, ethics, and psychology, to such practical matters as diet, timekeeping, and management of the royal chapel.<sup>18</sup> Some of the chapters are copied, adapted, or translated from other sources, including three chapters from the *Livro do Cavalgar*:

<i>Leal Conselheiro</i>	<i>Livro do Cavalgar</i>
Ch. 3	III.5 ch. 8
Ch. 5	III.5 ch. 9
Ch. 83	III.1 ch. 11

<sup>16</sup> Pedro, Infante of Portugal, and Fr. João Verba, *Livro da Virtuosa Bemfeitoria*, ed. Adelino de Almeida Calado, esp. p. ix; Pedro, Infante of Portugal, *Livro dos Offícios*; Greenfield, "The Patrimonial State"; Dias, *Arte de Ser Bom Cavaleiro*, p. 12; Salazar, "Impacto Humanístico", pp. 224–25. On the family's literary works in general, see Bell, *Portuguese Literature*, pp. 89–92; Gavilanes Laso, "La prosa profana", pp. 135–45; Lapa, *Dom Duarte e os Prosadores da Casa de Avis*. Cf. also below, p. 136 fn. 30.

<sup>17</sup> See Duarte, *Livro dos Conselhos*.

<sup>18</sup> On Duarte's works, see Botelho, *D. Duarte*; Lapa, "D. Duarte e a Prosa Didáctica".

## The *Livro do Cavalgar*

The *Livro do Cavalgar* survives in only a single copy, Paris Bibliothèque Nationale MS portuguais 5 (formerly MS 7007 of the French Royal Library), fols 99r–128r. The manuscript was not created before 1437, based on references to Duarte as king, and almost certainly not after 1440, when it appears to have left Portugal in the hands of Queen Eleanor. The codex is in folio format, unillustrated but richly adorned with decorative initials and marginal embellishments. The only other text in the manuscript is the sole surviving copy of Duarte's *Leal Conselheiro*, a work dedicated to Queen Eleanor: given the sumptuousness of the manuscript and what can be documented of its history, it may well have been commissioned for the queen.

A list of the contents of Duarte's library, compiled during his reign, includes a "book on riding composed by the king Dom Eduarte", certainly the same work, though perhaps not the same copy.<sup>19</sup> The work is also mentioned around 1500 in Rui de Pina's biography of Duarte. The passage, cited above, suggests that the author might actually have seen a copy of the work. About a hundred years later the *Livro do Cavalgar* is referenced by Duarte Nunes de Leão in his *Crónicas*, in terms that suggest that he had never actually seen it: "He composed a book for horsemen, in which he apparently gave instructions for riding well and for governing horses."<sup>20</sup> At about the same time the book was mentioned by Bernardo de Brito in his *Eló-gios dos Reis de Portugal*; both Brito and Leão are heavily dependent on Pina, and may simply be embroidering on their source. Manuel Carlos Andrade's 1790 treatise on horsemanship mentions the work, dating it to 1435, but referencing content that is not actually in the text, suggesting that Andrade had access to some other old book on horsemanship and wrongly identified it with Duarte's treatise.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Duarte, *Livro dos Conselhos*, p. 208.

<sup>20</sup> Leão, *Crónica*, pp. 778–79.

<sup>21</sup> Andrade, *Arte da cavallaria*, pp. 14, 339–40. In the latter passage, Andrade tell us that on p. 179 of Duarte's book the author recommends "placing the horse between two pillars using a headstall that I have invented". See also Pereira, *Naissance et Renaissance*, pp. 58–60. For other early references to Duarte's work, see Bourdon, "Question de priorité", pp. 4–7.

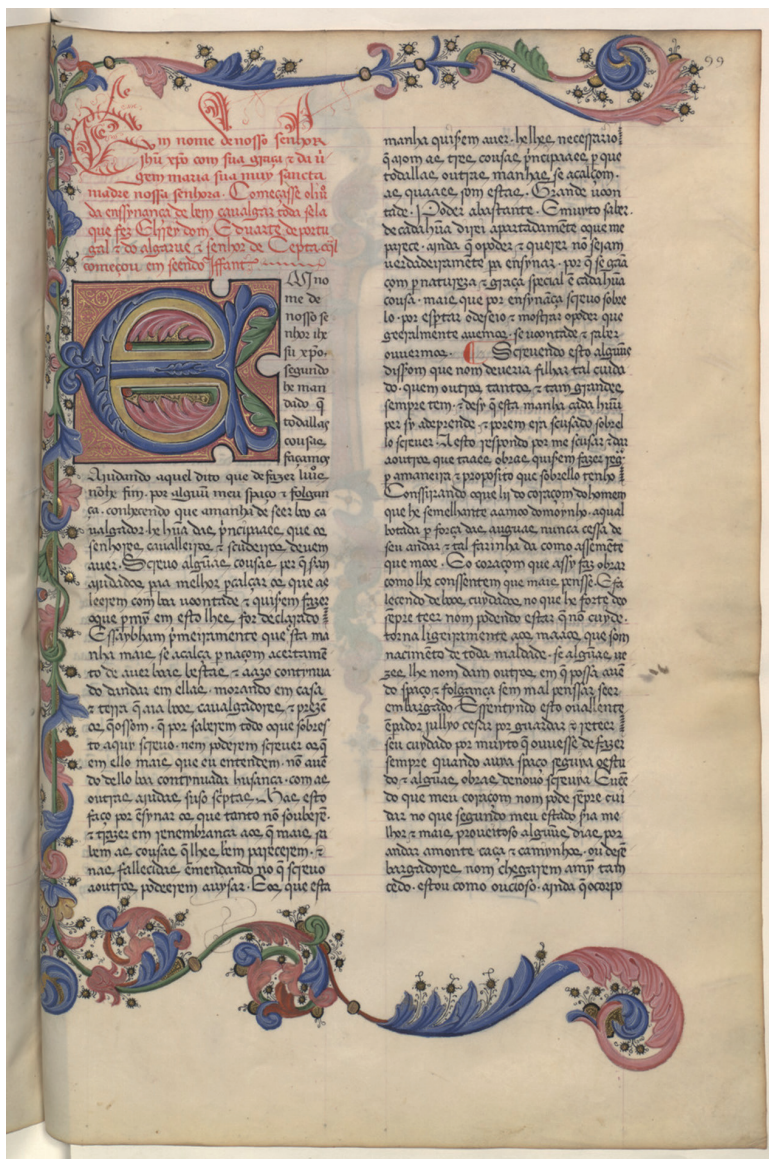


Plate 1. The opening of the *Livro do Cavalgar*  
(Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS portugais 5, fol. 99r).