# The “Ode” of sculptor Joaquim Machado de Castro: a word for an image

## A "Ode" do escultor Joaquim Machado de Castro: uma palavra para uma imagem

DOI: 10.20396/rhac.v6i1.20271

OLGA RUSINOVA
Pesquisadora Visitante no Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas da Universidade Estadual de Campinas (UNICAMP)
0000-0003-2720-8859

**Resumo**

A laudatória *Ode* foi composta pelo escultor português Joaquim Machado de Castro para comemorar a inauguração de sua obra-prima, a estátua equestre do rei D. José I (1775, Lisboa). Embora Machado de Castro continue sendo uma figura proeminente e até mesmo icônica na história da arte portuguesa, este texto tem sido amplamente negligenciado pelos estudiosos. Este artigo analisa a Ode como uma forma de ato performativo e de *écfrase*, destinada a conduzir o leitor por diferentes camadas de "sentido oculto" incorporadas ao monumento régio por meio de sua descrição verbal.

**Palavras-chave:** Portugal. Estátua equestre. Écfrase.

**Abstract**

The laudatory *Ode* was composed by the Portuguese sculptor Joaquim Machado de Castro to commemorate the unveiling of his masterpiece, the equestrian statue of King D. José I (1775, Lisbon). Although Machado de Castro remains a prominent and even iconic figure in the history of Portuguese art, this text has been largely overlooked by scholars. This article analyzes the Ode as both a performative utterance and a form of *ekphrasis*, intended to guide the reader through different layers of "hidden meaning" embedded in the royal monument through its verbal description.

**Keywords:** Portugal. Equestrian statue. Ekphrasis.

## Introduction[1]

In 1775, as the equestrian monument to King D. José I destined for Lisbon's main square (the *Praça do Comércio*) neared completion, sculptor Joaquim Machado de Castro composed a celebratory poem [Figure 1]. Its elaborate title functions simultaneously as a dedication to the sovereign, a reference to the event, and, notably, a form of authorial signature: "To the Most Faithful King D. José I, Our Lord, who established his colossal Equestrian statue in the Square of Commerce. ODE by Joaquim Machado de Castro, Sculptor of this Royal Statue and of all its accompanying sculpture".[2]

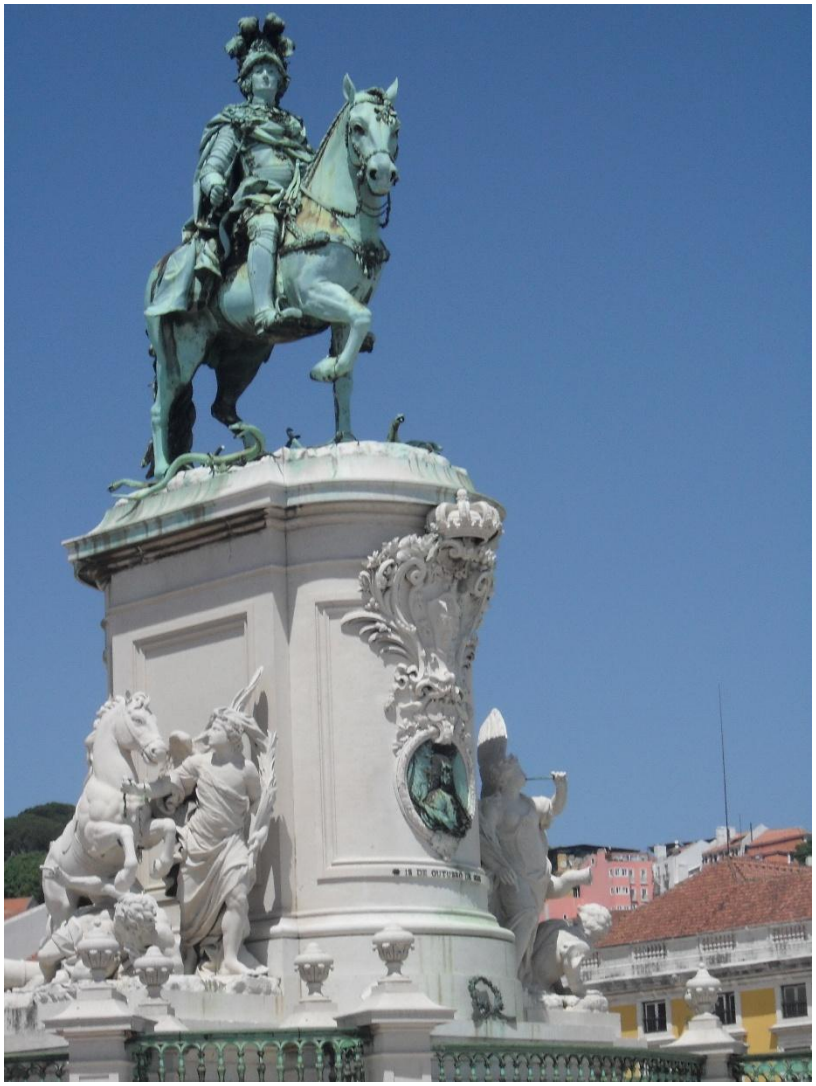

**Figure 1:**
Joaquim Machado de Castro, **The equestrian statue of the king D. José I**, 1775. Lisbon.
Photo of the author.

[1] I would like to thank Anastasiia Presniakova, an MA graduate from Sapienza University of Rome, for her assistance in preparing the final version of this text.

[2] CASTRO, Joaquim Machado de. Ao Rei Fidelíssimo D. José I. Nosso Senhor, colocando-se a sua colossal Estatua Equestre, na Praça do Commercio, ODE por Joaquim Machado de Castro, Estatuario da mesma Regia Estatua, e de toda a escultura adjacente. Lisboa: Régia Oficina Tipográfica, 1775. All citations are given in my translation, unless otherwise indicated.

The detailed enumeration of the sculptor's work – including "all accompanying sculpture" – elevates his name to the status akin to noble lineage. The explicit mention of his role ("sculptor of this royal statue") embodies a sovereign act of legitimation: the king, through his will, establishes the statue, thereby affirming the artist's identity. Finally, the conjoining of two arts – poetry and sculpture – signals a reading principle embedded within the text itself. All elements of the title are precisely calibrated: their mirrored structure brings order to multiplicity [Figure 2].

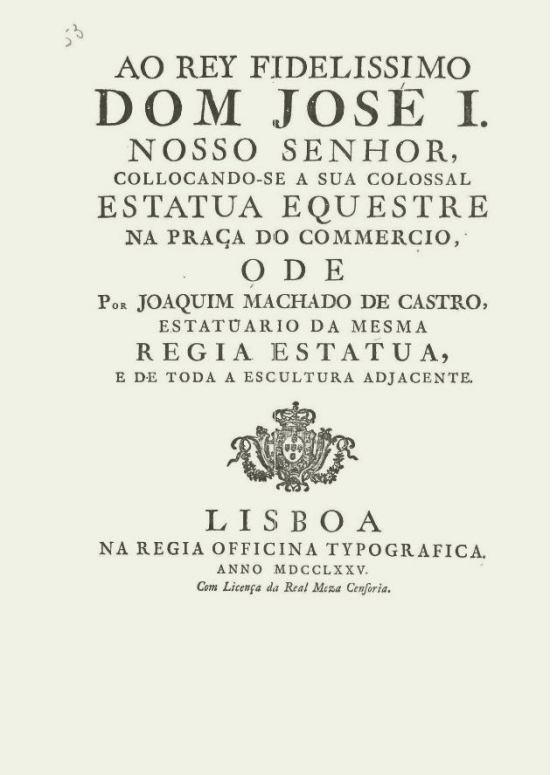
AO REY FIDELISSIMO
DOM JOSÉ I.
NOSSO SENHOR,
COLLOCANDO-SE A SUA COLOSSAL
ESTATUA EQUESTRE
NA PRAÇA DO COMMERCIO,
ODE
POR JOAQUIM MACHADO DE CASTRO,
ESTATUARIO DA MESMA
REGIA ESTATUA,
E DE TODA A ESCULTURA ADJACENTE.
LISBOA
NA REGIA OFFICINA TYPOGRAFICA.
ANNO MDCCLXXV.
Com Licença da Real Meza Censoria.

**Figure 2:**
Joaquim Machado de Castro, **The title page of the Ode**.
In: CASTRO, Joaquim Machado de. Ao rei fidelíssimo D. José I, 1775

Neither the poem nor the monument, when considered individually**,** were particularly innovative within the broader context of European art. The poem's elaborate and even excessive structure reflects the refined wit of a baroque *concetto* from the previous century, while the monument clearly follows the conventions of royal monuments developed during the reign of Louis XIV.

The composition is complex and multilayered: a tall, stepped pedestal of white lioz limestone (also called *royal stone*) elevates the bronze rider. The sovereign quite literally dominates the vast square, framed by the surrounding buildings and a triumphal arch. The monument, approximately eight times life-size, unfolds like a rising wave – beginning with oversized steps and culminating in the elevated figure.[3] The pedestal is flanked by allegorical groups, and a bronze medallion bearing the likeness of the Marquis of Pombal, the king's Prime minister and the project's initiator, adorns its front face. On the back, a marble relief by Machado de Castro contributes to the overall iconographic ensemble and symbolically supports the equestrian figure above. Yet despite their reliance on foreign models, both the poem and the monument represented the first and unprecedented achievements in Portugal. More importantly, the European tradition – particularly the French model – was reinterpreted in light of Portuguese political reality and transformed into a distinctly national expression.

[3] Originally, it was ten times life-size.

This article neither aims to analyze Joaquim Machado de Castro's (1731–1822) involvement with the monument nor to reconstruct the historical context of its production, subjects that have been well explored by scholars, from the classic studies of José-Augusto França to more recent research.[4] Such historical references will be made only when necessary to contextualize and support the central focus of this study: an analysis of the *Ode*, composed by the sculptor himself. Through a close reading of this text, I aim to clarify how both Machado de Castro and his contemporaries understood the transformation of a *baroque pastiche* into what was later perceived as a *national neoclassical* monument.

The stylistic terms set in italics are most frequently employed by art historians over recent decades to describe this sculptural ensemble. Yet when it comes to defining the style of any major work of this kind, scholarly opinions often diverge. In the extensive literature on the monument, stylistic labels – whether *baroque*, *rococo*, or *neoclassical* – function less as neutral descriptors and more as ideological or ethical coefficients. They serve to reinforce broader arguments: either about the pressures imposed by conservative royal administration or about the progressive intentions of the artist.

In other words, the discussion of style tends to focus not on formal classifications alone, but rather on the degree to which the sculptor succeeded – or failed – in demonstrating his artistic capabilities. Therefore, Machado de Castro's work is frequently interpreted through one of two opposing narratives: either as the constrained output of an artist limited by courtly expectations (*the myth of the victim*), or as a bold assertion of creative agency within those same constraints (*the myth of the hero*). These interpretive models gained prominence in the decades following the Second World War and the Salazar dictatorship in Portugal. It was also during this period that detailed studies of the monument began to emerge. With few exceptions, these models continue to influence scholarly discourse surrounding the monument up to the present.

However, documents and testimonies from Machado de Castro's own time suggest a different perspective, one that does not rely on the opposition between *national* and *derivative*. In the court and intellectual circles of 18th-century Portugal, these categories were not seen as mutually exclusive but rather as complementary. Machado de Castro himself appears to have embraced this view: his primary aim was not to produce the most *original* monument, but the most *patriotic*, as he repeatedly emphasized.

Unquestionably, national artistic superiority at the time was measured not by originality in the modern sense, but by the repetition and recognizable refinement of established forms.[5] These included

[4] For instance, see: FRANÇA, Jose-Augusto. **Prefácio e notas: Descripção analytica da execução da estatua equestre, erigida em Lisboa a gloria do Senhor Rei Fidelissimo D. José I.** Lisboa: Academia Nacional de Belas Artes, 1975. *E-book*. Available from: https://purl.pt/960. Accessed on: 30 jun. 2025; FRANÇA, Jose-Augusto. **Lisboa Pombalina e o Iluminismo**. 3ª ed. Lisboa: Livraria Bertrand, 1988.

[5] As Louis Marin has observed regarding the repetition: "to paint the king's portrait is to make the portrait of all possible [...] kings, since in its representation it is the portrait of all the others [...]". MARIN, Louis. **Portrait of the King**. London: Palgrave Macmillan

the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius, canonized during the Renaissance and later codified in France into a typology of the equestrian royal monument, widely adopted by European courts. In this context, the Lisbon monument was conceived as the most prominent, the most visually impressive, and, particularly in terms of bronze casting, the most technically advanced in Portugal – and possibly in all of Europe – as envisioned by the royal administration. It is also essential to note that the monument was executed entirely by Portuguese hands, by people who knew French models only through prints, casts, and treatises. From Eugénio dos Santos' initial 1759 sketch conceived during the post-earthquake reconstruction of Lisbon to the final version sculpted by Machado de Castro starting in 1770, the monument consistently retained its character as a national project.

As the monument's design underwent successive revisions, the equestrian statue gradually ceased to function as a mere monumental representation of the king and began to assert itself as an autonomous work of art. At the same time, the sculptor's position evolved. At the outset, Machado de Castro agreed to produce a model swiftly and faithfully based on the existing sketch. Yet he soon began to rework and refine the composition, seeking to emphasize the figure of the king both as a hero and as a reformer – an image that, in his view, most faithfully embodied national ideals. What began as a routine, a mechanical task evolved into a deliberate artistic act. Machado de Castro recognized this shift himself, seeking to affirm his position in the eyes of those in power while lamenting the lack of understanding he encountered. On the occasion of the monument's inauguration, he published his *Ode*.

Despite belonging to distinct artistic domains, the Ode and the monument are examined here with an emphasis on the textual dimension. What, then, justifies placing the Ode at the core of the analysis, rather than the monument it was meant to accompany? The answer lies in its unique rhetorical structure and in the space it affords the sculptor to assert his position through language – something the statue alone could never fully articulate.

Machado de Castro's *Ode* stands apart from the many poems dedicated to statues and monuments since the Renaissance, from Sadoleto's ode on the discovery of the *Laocoön* to the formulaic verses routinely composed for royal inaugurations. These poetic texts typically aim to convey a structured visual impression of the image. As Michael Baxandall wrote, "the nature of language [...] means that the description is less a representation of the picture, or even a representation of seeing the picture, than a

UK, 1988. On the related absence of originality and the repetition of forms in French equestrian monuments see: MCCLELLAN, Andrew. The Life and Death of a Royal Monument: Bouchardon's Louis XV. Oxford Art Journal, v. 23, n. 2, p. 1-27, 1 Jan. 2000. Available from: https://doi.org/10.1093/oxartj/23.2.1. Accessed: 10 May 2002.

representation of thinking about having seen the picture".[6] In other words, such descriptions generally involve a form of aesthetic judgment – admiration, interpretation, or, in one way or another, critique in the broadest sense.

The *Ode* offers no aesthetic evaluation whatsoever; moreover, it does not describe the monument. What makes it compelling, this article proposes, is precisely this: it is not *descriptive* but *performative*. It is a speech-act – a textual gesture that does not aim to depict reality but to transform it. From the perspective of pragmatics, or the theory of speech acts, the *Ode* may be understood as a performative utterance, a realization of the speaker's identity and intention addressed to a specific audience. The *Ode*, this article argues, records a performative experience: the transformation of the king's statue into a work of art, and of the craftsman into an artist.

This raises the question: can the monument itself also be considered a *performative utterance*? In certain exceptional cases, the answer is yes. The equestrian statue of Peter the Great by Étienne-Maurice Falconet – unveiled in the capital of the Russian Empire in 1782, almost simultaneously with the Lisbon monument – may be seen in this light, within its specific historical and cultural context. As Falconet himself wrote: "Simplicity will govern the execution of the monument. There will be no barbarity, no popular adoration, and no symbol of the nation whatsoever. Peter the Great is his own subject and attribute, and it is enough to show him".[7] It is precisely this performative dimension – the creation of an alternative symbolic reality – that would later resonate in the literary corpus known as the *Petersburg text*.[8]

The monument to D. José I lacks performative intensity. Shaped by its historical and political context, it does not create a new symbolic order but reaffirms an existing one: the sovereign's presence, his authority, and the city's subordination to that power. The Ode responds to the monument by translating its declarative presence into poetic form, granting the text, rather than the statue, the capacity to construct an alternative reality. From this perspective, the monument serves above all as a structure of affirmation, a material manifestation of royal power and political continuity.

---

[6] BAXANDALL, Michael. **Patterns of Intention**: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures. [*S. l.*]: Yale University Press, 1987, p. 6-11. For an example of such approach see: *Idem*. **Words for Pictures**: Seven Papers on Renaissance Art and Criticism. [*S. l.*]: Yale University Press, 2011, p. 99-116.

[7] DIDEROT, Denis. **Œuvres complètes. Revues par J. Assézat (et M. Tourneux).** [*S. l.*], 1875, p. 186.

[8] TOPOROV, Vladimir. **Petersburg text of Russian literature**: Selected works. St. Petersburg: Nauka, 2003.

**One. The King-Statue**

The monument, firmly anchored in the spatial and ceremonial fabric of Lisbon, establishes royal authority within the city's visual landscape. The *Ode*, in turn, takes up this fixed image and sets it in motion through the dynamics of poetic expression. Together, they function as parallel forms through which sovereignty is enacted: materially in bronze and stone, and rhetorically in verse. Where the statue affirms royal presence through scale, material, and spatial command, the *Ode* articulates a different mode of elevation – not by reproducing the king's likeness, but by composing his figure through language. The sovereign emerges not as an individual subject, but as a vessel of virtues, shaped according to a sacred and rhetorical logic.

The hymn of praise begins in an elevated tone, following the stylistic conventions of the ode genre:

> A lofty subject I seize with fervent heart;
> For you, O Mighty King, I tune the lyre,
> Together with delighted Pindus. (1) [9]

What exactly does Machado de Castro celebrate? Not the king as an individual person, but rather his qualities as a ruler – qualities that are, in fact, highly abstract:

> Behold the Royal Benignity,
> The tender love of a Father we find in you,
> The shining Righteousness,
> The blessings we enjoy today… (3)

This enumeration of virtues — Mercy, Fatherly Love, Justice, and so forth — follows a ritualized formula derived from traditional attributes of the Divine, rooted in Biblical language.[10] Such references were not a personal gesture on the part of the poet but were fully consistent with the rhetorical conventions of official culture in 18th-century Portugal, where royal power was understood to embody not only political authority but also a religious role of national guardianship. As Eduardo Romero de Oliveira

[9] CASTRO, *op. cit.*, 1775, p. 3. Here and throughout, the text is cited from this edition, with references to the corresponding stanza numbers.

[10] Consider, for example: "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him"; or: "Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face"; or again: "He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he." King James Version, respectively, John 4:16, Psalm 89:14 (88:15), Deuteronomy 32:4. See also: MARIN, Louis. Portrait of the King. University of Minnesota Press: 1988.

notes, "the Portuguese king was conceived as a protector-king, as the royal Portuguese power had a religious power of salvation."[11]

This fusion of religious conceptions and official rhetoric also influences how Machado de Castro introduces the statue within the Ode. The king's image is not conceived as a form of artistic self-expression, but as an icon-like presence, a symbolic manifestation of authority and divine order. According to David Freedberg: "because a statue is named as a god, or consecrated as a cult statue, that it partakes of the numinous qualities of the divinity".[12] Instead of portraying the sovereign through personal attributes, the *Ode* renders him as a non-human figure of absolute authority – an abstract presence shaped by ceremonial structure and endowed with attributes associated with the divine.[13] In constructing this figure, Machado de Castro draws an implicit parallel between the textual presence of royal power and its material embodiment in the statue, underscoring their shared role as instruments of representation and reverence.

This symbolic convergence of text and sculpture gains further depth when viewed through the physical transformation of the monument itself. By 1759, the tied structures and the pedestal foundation had already been projected as part of the preliminary plan for the layout of the square. [Figure 3] Ten years later, during the execution phase, Machado de Castro modified the proportions of the sculptural ensemble, accentuating its vertical thrust. Positioned at the center of an immense empty plaza, it no longer grounded the monarch by sheer mass (ruling through volume and physical dominance) but was now deliberately elevated above the movement of the city – thanks to a strikingly tall pedestal. [Figure 4] It alone measured 11 meters, standing at approximately one and a half times the height of the equestrian statue (6.8 meters), while the total height reached 18 meters.[14] Through this shift in scale and composition, Machado de Castro effectively raised the king to the level of a divine being – quite literally, to the realm of the celestial.

The statue thus became more than a sign of authority or a commemorative likeness. It functioned as a visual extension of the sovereign's presence in Lisbon – a projection of his continued rule. Here, the monarch's image was meant not simply to portray, but to serve, in effect, as his living embodiment.

---

[11] OLIVEIRA, Eduardo Romero de. O governo protetor: a representação do poder político em cerimoniais régios portugueses (séc. XVIII–XIX). **Varia História**, v. 22, n. 36, p. 476-493, 2006. Available from: https://www.scielo.br/j/vh/a/YvWhdq5sND6LVkgr8RvTQ4r/. Accessed on: 30 June 2025.

[12] FREEDBERG, David. **The power of images**: Studies in the history and theory of response. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989, p. 35.

[13] McClellan, by contrast, considers abstraction as a way of art-making. MCCLELLAN, Andrew. The Life and Death of a Royal Monument: Bouchardon's Louis XV. **Oxford Art Journal**, v. 23, n. 2, 2000, p. 18.

[14] Although the monument's total height according to Machado de Castro's original design was just below 18 meters (79 ⅜ Portuguese *palmas*), subsequent alterations to the square's surface and urban layout have reduced its visible height to approximately 14 meters.


**Figure 3:**
Carlos Mardel, **Praça do Comercio da cidade de Lisboa**, [between 1755 and 1763]. Engraving. BNP digital, e-515-r. Available via license: Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International at: [https://purl.pt/27602]

**Figure 4:**
**The view of the Square of Commerce (the *Praça do Comércio*).** Lisbon. Photo of the author.

This logic of substitution finds its roots in the French royal tradition, shaped by the political-theological doctrine of the king's two bodies, famously theorized by Ernst Kantorowicz.[15] By the reign of Louis XIV, this tradition had assumed a more explicitly political and secular character. The inauguration of royal monuments in French cities became part of a civic ritual that reinforced the notion of uninterrupted sovereign authority. Thus, the statues served to reaffirm the social order centered on the monarch, and they were perceived not merely as representations, but as legitimate substitutes for the sovereign himself. They were venerated in the monarch's physical absence, and, as François de Grenaille declared in a panegyric marking the inauguration of the statue of Louis XIII in Paris in 1639: "Images and Statues were invented in order to make one and the same person present in different places, to bring him to life in gold and bronze where he cannot be in person."[16]

In Portugal, the merging of national and imported traditions of royal ritual and visual manifestation of power in the statue of D. José I could well be the subject of a separate study. Without delving into this broader issue here, I will simply note that as a result of this cultural convergence, the sculptural ensemble installed in the main square of Lisbon was not understood as a *monument to the king* in the modern sense, but rather as a *statue of the king* – as it was in fact called at the time.

It did not commemorate the king retrospectively, but rather served as a substitute for his physical presence. First, it was erected during the monarch's lifetime. Second, the equestrian figure bore recognizable individual traits of the reigning sovereign. Third, unlike French monuments, which were often inaugurated to mark state occasions of political significance, Lisbon's first and foremost royal statue was unveiled on June 6 – the king's birthday – thereby establishing an explicit link between the sculpture and the royal person himself.

The statue's inauguration unfolded over three days, with allegorical processions, evening balls, and fireworks. At its center was a ceremonial moment where French secular protocol merged with Portuguese custom, blending civic ritual with religious solemnity. A prayer of thanksgiving was delivered by the head of the magistracy "in the name of the Most Glorious Inauguration," followed by the City Council's acclamations: "Hail, most august José! Glory! Glory!"[17] Through this ritual, the king's patronage

---

[15] KANTOROWICZ, Ernst Hartwig. **The king's two bodies**: A study in mediaeval political theology. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1997.

[16] MCCLELLAN, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

[17] See, for example: PEREIRA, Ângelo. **A inauguração da estátua equestre de el-rei D. José I**: narração verídica feita por um jesuíta, testemunha ocular do acontecimento. Lisboa: Labor, 1938; R., A. d. S. **Carta ou narração conciza da festividade feita na cidade de Lisboa, na collocação da estatua equestre do nosso fidelissimo monharca com a exposição das figuras, de que se orna a baze, em que descança a mesma estatua**. Lisboa: Offic. de Antonio Rodrigues Galhardo, [s.d]; BARBOSA, Domingos Caldas. **Narração dos applausos com que O Juiz do Povo e Casa dos Vinte-Quatro festeja a felicissima Inauguração da Estatua Equestre onde tambem se expõem as allegorias dos Carros, Figuras, e tudo o mais concernente ás ditas Festas.** Lisboa: Regia Officina Typografica, 1775.

over his capital was affirmed and the presence of his image in bronze – "where he cannot be in person" – was symbolically sanctified.

From its inception, the statue of D. José I was interpreted not simply as a political tribute but as a sacralized form of kingship – a manifestation of the sovereign's protective authority. This symbolic elevation helped shield the first public royal equestrian figure in Portugal from the informal familiarity of everyday urban surroundings.[18]

In previous centuries, sculptural depictions of the king in Portugal were largely confined to funerary monuments or architectural figures integrated into church façades. In these earlier contexts, sanctity was vested in the monarch's physical remains, which functioned more as relics than as representations.[19] Moreover, in both Portugal and Spain, dynastic authority was traditionally affirmed through ritualized contact with the people rather than through artistic or permanent visual markers. As a result, standalone royal figures in civic spaces had not yet been considered necessary.

Throughout the early 18th century, the idea of installing a public sculptural representation of the ruler was perceived as foreign and unsuitable. Only during the reign of João V did the possibility begin to emerge – as evidenced by the proposals by architect Carlos Mardel for fountains adorned with equestrian and standing figures of the king.[20] None of these projects came to fruition, suggesting that the visual vocabulary of sovereign power was still in transition. Eventually, it was the statue of D. José I that resolved this hesitation, establishing for the first time a permanent and elevated figure of the king within Lisbon's civic order.

The opportunity to install an equestrian statue *in the French manner* arose at the beginning of D. José I's reign, during the reconstruction of Lisbon following the devastating earthquake of 1755.[21] Under

[18] It is worth noting that before the 1755 earthquake, the Square of Commerce functioned both as a marketplace and as the Palace Square (The *Terreiro do Paço*), and that afterwards it came to house the Stock Exchange.

[19] See, for example, RIBEIRO, Ana Isabel. **The Use of Religion in the Ceremonies and Rituals of Political Power, Portugal, 16th to XVIII centuries**. [*S. l.*]: Edizioni Plus, 2006; LOPES, Belchior. Os ritos fúnebres dos membros da Casa Real portuguesa (séculos XIV-XVII): mudanças e continuidades. **História. Revista da FLUP**, v. 12, n. 1, p. 10-38, 2023. Available from: https://doi.org/10.21747/0871164X/hist12_1a2. Accessed on: 30 June 2025.

[20] FARIA, Miguel Figueira de. O modelo Praça/Monumento Central na evolução urbanística da cidade de Lisboa: Notas sobre Toponímia, Urbanismo e História dos Monumentos Públicos. *In*: LISBOA ILUMINISTA E O SEU TEMPO, 1994. **Actas do Congresso Lisboa iluminista e o seu tempo**. Lisboa: Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa, 1997, p. 51-96. Also: FARIA, Miguel Figueira de. 6 June, the king's birthday present: an insight into the history of royal monuments in Portugal at the end of the Ancien Régime. *In*: CHASTEL-ROUSSEAU, C. (org.). **Reading the Royal Monument in Eighteenth-Century Europe**. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011.

[21] "The fatal Earthquake Lisbon suffered on November first, 1755, even while causing several disasters in this kingdom also opened the way for a few felicities, as a good many politicians believe." CASTRO, Joaquim Machado de. **Descripção analytica**. 1ª ed. Lisboa: Imp. Regia, 1810, p. 2. The citations here and throughout are taken from the recently published edition: CASTRO, Joaquim Machado de. **Analytical Description of the Execution of the Royal Equestrian Statue of His Most Faithful Majesty King Joseph I**, by Joaquim Machado de Castro. Translation by Patrícia Delayti Telles; coordinated by Miguel Figueira de Faria. Lisbon:

the direction of Eugénio dos Santos, the architect leading the redesign of the city's central square, the damaged structures – the royal palace and the patriarchal cathedral – were demolished. These buildings had previously functioned as the principal signs of the monarch's material embodiment in the capital.[22] The statue, by contrast, was conceived as a means of preserving that presence in bronze.

At the same time, this initiative was not only a matter of urban design, but also of political necessity. After surviving the earthquake, the king refused to return to what he considered a perilous location and instead took up permanent residence in a provisional palace on the outskirts of Lisbon. The statue thus assumed a compensatory function, substituting visibility for absence at the very center of the reconstructed city.[23] A similar pattern could be observed in late 17th-century France, when the growing number of royal statues in Paris coincided with the transfer of the court from the capital to Versailles – a shift that likewise required symbolic compensation in the urban landscape. [24]

The royal statue was now intended to be both seen and revered – in Portugal in the second half of the 18th century, as in France a century earlier. As François de Grenaille, already cited above, observed: "In this way, the people may assuage their constant desire to see before them the prince that they adore." [25] A similar sentiment appears at the close of the first stanza of the Ode:

> And who, my Lord, would find it strange
> That Plectrum and Drawing
> Join hands as friends in the same pursuit? (1)

The shared purpose of poetry and art - *Plectrum and Drawing* – is to fulfill that same longing: to create the image of the adored sovereign.

Combining the powers of the arts was traditionally considered the exclusive right of literature. In 1769, for example, Basílio da Gama opens his dedicatory sonnet to "*O Uruguai*" with a direct appeal to the sculptor – the "eloquent creator" – asking him to raise a statue to the "flawless Hero." [26] Six years later,

---

Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa – Autónoma Edições, 2025. Available from: https://doi.org/10.26619/978-989-9002-55-5. Accessed on: 30 June 2025.

[22] MAXWELL, Kenneth. O Terramoto de 1755 e a recuperação urbana sob a influência do Marquês de Pombal. *In*: O Grande Terramoto de Lisboa. Lisboa: FLAD/Público, 2005. v. 2, p. 109-136.

[23] For other, more factual discussions on the king's physical absence, notably his decision to observe the inauguration from behind a curtain rather than appear publicly, see: FARIA, *op. cit.*, 2011; MALATO, Maria Luísa; OLIVEIRA, Fernando Matos. All verses he read about the equestrian statue: power performance and literary audiences. *In*: FRANCO, José Eduardo; OLIVEIRA, Luiz Eduardo; VOGEL, Christine (org.). Between Nero and Prometheus: Marquis of Pombal and the emergence of party history (18th-21st centuries). Universität Vechta/Theya Editores/Editora Criação, 2022. Available from: https://repositorio-aberto.up.pt/bitstream/10216/146116/2/594540.pdf. Accessed on: 30 June 2025.

[24] See: MCCLELLAN, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

[25] *Ibidem*.

[26] The Prime Minister under King D. José I, later known as the Marquis of Pombal.

Machado de Castro's *Ode* reclaims this gesture, no longer as a rhetorical topos but as a concrete act. Speaking in the first person, he recalls having depicted "Your Sovereign Image in sculpture", only to promise:

> Another noble offering I give
> To Lusitania's folk and the knowing World:
> Thy Effigy appears once more –
> No longer wrought, but written. (2)

In this way, the sculptor in the *Ode* is not a metaphorical figure, but a historically grounded persona – one who fully inhabits the poetic voice and mobilizes the tools of verse to perform a specific task: to venerate the sovereign by multiplying his presence across different media. Far from offering a symbolic gesture alone, the *Ode* affirms the artist's role as a cultural agent – someone endowed with the power to transform royal authority into form, and form into lasting memory.

The joy of contemplating the Sovereign increases as the number of his images multiplies – both visual and verbal. This, at first glance, appears to be the very purpose of Machado de Castro's role as royal sculptor, and accordingly, of the Ode itself. On this discursive layer, the multiplication of images is understood as reproduction of the object of veneration – a confirmation of the *prototype's* presence, rather than the creation of an autonomous work of art.

However, this practice ultimately diminishes the significance of artistic work. Poetry and sculpture – the twin sisters (*irmãs gémeas*) – are no longer treated as expressive arts, but are assigned a purely instrumental function. In this system, the artist is no longer a creative subject either. He appears among the "friends of poetry and art" not as an originator, but as one who is tasked with realizing a vision not his own. His role is to execute, not to invent: his work becomes craft – a matter of technical skill, a mechanical transfer of a predefined image. There is no space for personal intention. The artist is not an author, but a tool.[27]

However, this conception of authorship should be examined more closely, as it underlies both the monument and the structure of the Ode.

Among 18th-century European sculptors, the traditional division between *conception* and *execution* was challenged, perhaps, most readily in France. This is not surprising: by then, the French academic

[27] See, for example: PEVSNER, Nikolaus. **Academies of art, past and present.** New York: Da Capo Press, 1973. Also: GUICHARD, Charlotte. Arts libéraux et arts libres à Paris au XVIII e siècle: peintres et sculpteurs entre corporation et Académie royale. **Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine**, v. 49, n. 3, p. 54-68, 2002.

school had undergone significant development.[28] For instance, Étienne-Maurice Falconet, mentioned earlier, wrote that the sculptor must bear responsibility for both the idea and its material realization.[29]

Despite the polemical nature of this statement, he was not alone in practice. As the history of French sculpture shows, Falconet and others were often required to execute commissions based on pre-existing designs or models. However, his demand applied primarily to human-scale free-standing statues and small-scale works. By contrast, equestrian monuments were traditionally classified as colossal, as indicated in the Watelet–Lévesque dictionary: "[...] a statue of extraordinary size, intended to strike the imagination through its exceptional dimensions. These works [...] sought to represent power and majesty through monumental scale."[30]

In relation to public sculpture, and especially royal equestrian monuments, the question of artistic autonomy was rarely discussed at the time. For sculptors working on monumental commissions in the 18th century, a certain degree of independence was assumed. Equestrian statues of monarchs were developed in consultation with the patron or city administration; nonetheless, the sculptor was recognized as the author of the overall design. This level of trust in the artist is not surprising: with few exceptions, such as Falconet's project, equestrian monuments followed a highly standardized formula. The Capitoline statue of Marcus Aurelius served as the primary model, symbolizing the continuity of sovereign power "through the ages."

Within the academic system, each subject or theme was associated with an established set of compositional models, which artists were expected, or at least encouraged, to follow in the conception of their work. The ruler's portrait could appear either as a warrior or, later, as a peaceful king-legislator. These choices were guided by the monument's visual program: allegorical figures, the posture of the horse and gesture of the rider, and his costume. As McClellan has shown, contemporaries were keenly attuned to distinctions among monuments, even at a time when both older and newly erected statues coexisted in abundance, and even when such differences might appear minor from today's perspective.[31] In this sense, the sculptor's authorship was visible: it consisted in shaping a new interpretation within a fixed symbolic code.

---

[28] See, for example: RÉAU, Louis. **Étienne-Maurice Falconet**. Paris: Demotte, v. 2, 1922; RÉAU, Louis. **Histoire de l'expansion de l'art français; pays scandinaves, Angleterre, Amérique du Nord.** Paris: H. Laurens, 1931; LEVEY, Michael. **Painting and sculpture in France, 1700-1789**. [*S. l.*]: Yale University Press, 1995.

[29] FALCONET, Etienne. **Oeuvres complètes d'Étienne Falconet, adjoint a recteur de la ci-devant Académie de peinture et scuplture de Paris, honoraire de celle de Saint-Pétersbourg, etc.** 3rd ed. Paris: Dentu, imprimeur-libraire, 1808.

[30] WATELET, Claude-Henri; LÉVESQUE, Pierre-Charles. **Dictionnaire des arts de peinture, sculpture et gravure**. Paris: L. F. Prault, 1792.

[31] MCCLELLAN, *op. cit.*, p.20.

Beyond that, sculptors asserted their authorship in various ways – for example, by publishing treatises in their own name or participating in such publications. These texts typically described the process of developing a work in detail, included precise measurements, and often devoted sections to technical questions such as casting. A characteristic feature was the presence of numerous images showing the work both in progress and in its final form.

Machado de Castro also operated within this framework, grounded in the distinction between *conception* and *execution* – which makes his determination to claim the *conception* of the monument especially clear. He was likely familiar with how the role of the monumental sculptor (as we would now call it) was understood in France. The catalogue of his personal library includes a significant number of French works by writers and artists such as Pierre Patte, Piganiol de la Force, and Mariette – all dealing with monuments and statuary. [32]

However, within the Portuguese royal court, authorship carried a distinctly different meaning. The notion of *conception* extended well beyond artistic intention and encompassed administrative and technical concerns. To understand this specific view, it is necessary to briefly recall the origins of the monument to D. José I, considering that the historical background of the monument, as well as its artistic features, have already been the subject of extensive and thorough scholarly analysis. In 1770, Machado de Castro was invited to participate in a competition organized by the Royal Office of Public Works. Competing for the right to produce the royal statue, the artists were required to submit a completed three-dimensional model based on sketches mentioned earlier. Machado de Castro's model was approved, and the commission was entrusted to him – on the condition that he continue to follow the same preliminary drawings, which he considered inadequate for the task. As he later wrote, the architect had

> […] left us a drawing for the Statue and its pedestal, with two groups of figures, which adorn it. And I believe his intent must have been not to show the architectural project of the Square without its principal object. And that is why he also made, or had made, the drawing, to indicate it. I cannot believe he would have wanted to force us to follow his drawing in the execution of the Statue […][33]

From the outset, Machado de Castro found the sketch lacking on both technical and artistic grounds. For him, it was a disjointed collection of parts, poorly resolved and incorrectly proportioned. The future monument, in his eyes, lacked coherence from top to bottom – from the figure of the king in a

[32] See FARIA, Miguel Figueira de. **Machado de Castro (1731-1822)**: estudos. Lisboa: Livros Horizonte, 2008, p. 165-177. Also see the section "Bibliography Mentioned in the Analytical Description": CASTRO, *op. cit.*, 2025, p. 425-439.
[33] CASTRO, *op. cit.*, 2025, p. 68.

modern riding coat that "can no longer be seen without a laugh," to the side figure of Asia, represented by the Elephant, which "seems to have been torn from its mother's womb in order to be placed there." According to the sculptor, translating such a sketch into a finished model "would have meant to show insufferable audacity to the Professors, and crass ignorance to the whole World..."

Already at the competition stage, Machado de Castro requested permission to submit his own version of the monument, in which the equestrian king would be dressed "in the Roman manner" – that is, in a tunic and crowned with a laurel wreath. However, depicting the sovereign in partial nudity was, unsurprisingly, not allowed. He was instructed to return to the design that had already received official approval back in 1759.

Later, he would describe in detail the many changes he had hoped to introduce to the sketch – and would list the few that were actually permitted. In his eyes, the mechanical reproduction of isolated elements from someone else's design became an artistic and professional disaster. As he wrote:

> There is no monument of this kind in which the chosen sculptor was not entrusted entirely with its execution [...]. However, I couldn't say this, nor could I refrain from following with my eyes closed the orders I was given. Judging that, with some diplomacy, I could achieve the faculty to improve them, avoiding the flaws I knew of, I accepted the papers, and started my first small model in late December 1770.[34]

The task of reproducing the sketch was evidently seen as straightforward by those overseeing the commission. Later, the sculptor complained about the extremely tight deadlines he had been given. By the end of June 1771 – only six months after producing the small wax model – he was already presenting the second version in clay, and by mid-July (10 July 1771), he was ordered to begin work on the full-scale plaster model. Within five months, by 10 March 1772, the model was finished. Two years later, in 1774, it was cast in bronze. The polishing and patination of the statue took another six months to complete. Meanwhile, the side figures were being carved in white stone. A bronze medallion with the portrait of the Marquis of Pombal was attached to the base of the statue, while the allegorical relief for the back of the pedestal was completed only after the inauguration.

Machado de Castro later explained that he was forced to follow instructions and work under severe time constraints. Nevertheless, regardless of the restrictions imposed by the original design, he saw the project as a civic and personal duty – a service to the King and to the Nation. He strove to execute it to the best of his ability, within the bounds of what was permitted: "[...] the faults I was forced to commit, impel

[34] *Ibidem*, p. 90.

me to show that these faults, in that work, are not the effect of a universal blindness; but of a particular and extravagant caprice, invincible beyond my strength and that of any other Vassal Sculptor".[35]

In this restrictive environment, artistic difficulty stems not from the creative process itself but from external limitations. The sculptor's task is not to invent, but to negotiate space for authorship within institutional boundaries. Although formally a gesture of praise to the king and the monument, the *Ode* subtly resists these impositions. For Machado de Castro, writing verse becomes a way to move beyond the expectations placed on a court artist, allowing him to engage with the intellectual and creative pursuits.

**Two. "Muted Poetry"**

Poetry is not Machado de Castro's primary domain. Within Portuguese artistic milieu, the prevailing assumption holds that a sculptor cannot aspire to the elevated sphere of literature. Machado acknowledges this prejudice: "I was told of a certain painter who, without even having read my writing, laughed at me, saying that *only things or the products of their craft are expected from artists* (italics in the original – O.R.); and he condemned me for loving poetry," he writes.[36]

Yet the *Ode* makes clear that Machado de Castro does not conceive of sculpture as mere manual labor. Instead, he positions artistic creation as a form of intellectual inquiry, claiming a place within the broader debates of Enlightenment culture. Through the act of writing, he asserts his role not only as a craftsman but as a participant in shaping ideas and cultural meaning.

By contrast, modern scholarship tends to treat the Ode as a minor or secondary work – a curiosity that merely illustrates his range of interests. Academic attention usually focuses on Machado de Castro's art-theoretical texts written between the 1780s and 1810s: "Carta que hum afeiçoado ás Artes do Desenho..." ("A Letter from an Amateur of the Fine Arts to a Young Sculptor"),[37] "Discurso sôbre as utilidades do desenho" ("A Discourse on the Usefulness of Drawing"), and above all, "Descrição Analítica..." ("Analytical Description of the Equestrian Statue") – widely considered the foundational text of Portuguese art literature in the 18th century.

The later treatise "Descrição Analítica", written years after the Ode, revisits many of the same themes, further developing Machado de Castro's reflections on sculpture, authorship, and the connection between word and image. In this text (already cited above), he does more than describe the monument's

[35] *Ibid.*, p 80.
[36] CASTRO, Joaquim Machado de. Discurso sobre as utilidades do desenho, dedicado à Rainha N. Senhora. Lisboa: na offic. de Antonio Rodrigues Galhardo, impressor do Conselho de Guerra, 1788.
[37] *Idem*. Carta que hum afeiçoado ás Artes do Desenho escreve-o a um aluno da Escultura, para o animar à perseverança no seu estudo. 2ª ed. Lisboa: Offic. da Academia R. das Sciencias, 1817.

production: here, he presents a theoretical interpretation of the entire composition, comparing it to a magnificent poem. "In Poetry, the Epic Poem and the Epopee are said to be the ultimate Effort of its invention, of its erudition and eloquence: in Sculpture it is an Equestrian Statue, aspiring to the colossal" – he writes.[38] This framework gives the treatise lasting significance: it becomes part of a broader European discussion on the relationship between poetry and the visual arts.

The reverse is also true: the ideas expressed in the "Descrição Analítica" show clearly which elements of European theory resonated with Enlightenment-era artists like Machado de Castro and his circle. This reception, however, was not without difficulty. In Portugal, the theme of the unity of the arts emerged relatively late and encountered persistent resistance. A cultural sensibility marked by the enduring legacy of the Counter-Reformation and the Council of Trent still tended to view both observation of nature and classical antiquity with caution. Images continued to be perceived primarily as illusions, therefore, artistic merit was judged by iconographic accuracy, rather than by aesthetic conception.[39]

For many artists and theorists of the period, including Machado de Castro, neoclassicism was not merely a stylistic choice but a critical and intellectual project. They adopted it as a way to challenge dominant conventions, shifting attention from surface appearance to underlying structure. *Mimesis* was redefined as both imitation of nature and a tool for reflection. Within this framework, neoclassicism became a strategy of renewal – or, at least, a means of raising the standards of artistic production.

It is therefore not surprising that Machado de Castro's lament in the "Descrição Analítica" – "I know that we, Portuguese, are considered among the cultivated nations to be almost (or entirely) blind to the Arts of Drawing" – appears alongside a strong affirmation of the kinship between sculpture and poetry.[40] This relationship becomes the foundation for much of his theoretical reflection.

If the treatise represents the outcome of a long intellectual process, its point of departure is already visible in the Ode. The theme of the sister arts, rooted in the classical notion of *ut pictura poesis*, is introduced there with clarity and rhetorical force.[41] In the opening stanza – already cited above – Poetry and Art appear side by side. In a footnote, Machado de Castro expands on the theme, presenting it as a novel claim: "Poetry is speaking Painting (or Sculpture), and these two kinds of Art – silent Poetry (or

[38] CASTRO, *op. cit.*, 2025, p. 70.
[39] PEREIRA, José Fernandes. O barroco do século XVII: transição e mudança. A História de um conceito estilístico. *In*: PEREIRA, Paulo (org.). História da Arte Portuguesa. 3rd ed. Lisboa: Círculo dos Leitores, 1999, p. 99-107.
[40] CASTRO, *op. cit.*, 2025, p. 80. J. F. Pereira stresses the erudite knowledge of the sculptor in his article based on his master's dissertation: PEREIRA, José Fernandes. As leituras de Machado de Castro. ArteTeoria, n. 1, p. 7-25, 2000. However, the author's commentaries in that context are framed through the lens of the *myth of the victim*, as previously discussed.
[41] TEIXEIRA, Ivan. Mecenato pombalino e poesia neoclássica. São Paulo: EDUSP/FAPESP, 1999, p. 525-527.

Rhetoric)."[42] There is no need to recall that this idea, widely popular in classical and neoclassical European aesthetics, traces its lineage to Horace's "Ars Poetica": "Poetry is like painting."

It is likely that Machado de Castro first encountered Horace's "Ars Poetica" and the idea of *ut pictura poesis* well before writing the Ode, through the work of Francisco José Freire (Candido Lusitano), the first translator of Horace into Portuguese. At the time, Machado was working as an assistant to the renowned Italian sculptor Alessandro Giusti, who oversaw the decoration of the new palace-monastery complex at Mafra. By then, he had already received a Jesuit education in his native Coimbra, followed by artistic training under the *Sculptor of saints* Nicolau Pinto in Lisbon, and later with José de Almeida, head of the Portuguese Romanist sculptors.

In other words, by the time he arrived in Mafra, Machado de Castro was already an established artist with a solid professional reputation. He remained with Giusti for fourteen years, from 1756 to 1770, until he was called to Lisbon to compete for the royal monument commission. During that period, his work focused not only on marble sculpture – the highest form of sculptural training – but also on the *liberal arts*, and especially literature.

This formative episode in Machado de Castro's life would later be recalled in the well-known *Historial Dictionary*:

> But in Mafra, a new future awaited him. The site had become a gathering place not only for foreign travelers, but also for Portuguese poets, artists, and men of learning. Machado made the most of these opportunities to educate himself through conversation with the learned. Among the regular visitors was the poet Cândido Lusitano, an admirer of the new artistic works produced there. He struck up a friendship with the young sculptor and soon became one of his closest allies. Recognizing Machado's eagerness to learn, he undertook to give him lessons in *Rhetoric* (italic mine – O.R.), which our artist accepted with gratitude. Mafra became, in a sense, not only a center of artistic training, but a kind of university offering him access to the best books of the time and to mentors who introduced him to the intellectual currents of the century.[43]

According to the same account, it was in Mafra that Machado de Castro's contact with the poet and painter Vieira Lusitano also left a deep mark on his literary development. New aesthetic ideas – rejecting the slavish imitation of the masters, the tyranny of rules, and promoting instead spontaneity,

[42] CASTRO, *op. cit.*, 1775, p. 3.

[43] AMARAL, Manuel (org.). Portugal - Dicionário Histórico, Corográfico, Heráldico, Biográfico, Bibliográfico, Numismático e Artístico. Lisboa: João Romano Torres Editor, 1904. *E-book*. Available from: http://www.arqnet.pt/dicionario/index.html. Accessed on: 30 June 2025.

enthusiasm, and the imitation of nature – were embraced by Machado with lasting conviction. He became, as the text puts it, "an enthusiastic disciple" of this vision.

One of Machado de Castro's earliest surviving literary efforts was a laudatory sonnet written in 1758 in honor of Vieira Lusitano. [44] Alongside repeated mentions of the painter's name, the text already features references to legendary artists of antiquity – Apelles, Zeuxis, and Parrhasius – while the accompanying notes quote Aristotle, Diogenes, Virgil, and others. It may be read as a rhetorical exercise in learned praise. Yet the final note is especially revealing: Machado praises Lusitano's painting not for its sensuality or technique, but for its intellectual eloquence: "His works are so richly endowed with symbols… each figure contains an idea, each gesture – a sentence." [45]

Over time, Machado de Castro's personal library came to reflect these interests. There was a book by Vieira Lusitano – now acting as a poet rather than a painter, but also the "Dicionário poético para uso da poesia portuguesa" – a two-volume dictionary "relating to poetry, for beginners in Portuguese verse," published in 1765 by another friend from Mafra: the Oratorian monk, humanist, and aforementioned poet Cândido Lusitano. The catalogue also records Lusitano's 1758 Portuguese translation of Horace's "Ars Poetica" – published the same year Machado was working in Mafra and studying rhetoric under Lusitano's guidance.[46] It is quite likely that they discussed the Horatian dictum *ut pictura poesis* in person.

Unlike the sonnet dedicated to Vieira Lusitano, the Ode addresses a political subject – it is written for King D. José I. To justify his purpose (the creation of an "image of the beloved sovereign"), Machado de Castro feels the need to explain why both poetry and sculpture are used together. Since *ut pictura poesis* functions here purely as a rhetorical device – a way to multiply the sovereign's image – it provides a valid justification for the structure of the Ode. Its instrumental nature is precisely what legitimizes the poetic gesture permissible. Tellingly, the Horatian reference appears only in a footnote. It remains outside the poem, authorizing it from a distance, without entering its rhetorical space.

Alongside the king, the Ode introduces a second central figure, the "Illustrious Hero." His presence adds another layer of meaning to the text. This figure – to use his full official title – is the king's State Secretary (Prime Minister), Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo, Count of Oeiras and Marquis of Pombal. Here is his portrait, cast in distinctly laudatory tones:

---

[44] The sonnet took the form of a gloss, or poetic commentary, on a poem dedicated to Lusitano by a learned Frei Antonio da Conceição.

[45] CASTRO, Machado de. Elogia ao sr. Francisco Vieira Lusitano, cavalleiro professo na Ordem de S. Thiago, digníssimo pintor de Sua Magestade Fidelíssima, etc., em um soneto glosado. *In*: CASTILHO, Júlio de (org.). **Amores de Vieira Lusitano. Apontamentos biográficos.** Lisboa: *[S.l.]*, 1901, p. 272.

[46] In 1748, Cândido Lusitano published "*Arte Poética ou Regras da Verdadeira Poesia" with references to Horace*, Aristotle, and Boileau. This publication preceded his 1758 translation of Horace's "*Ars Poetica*".

> The Marquis of Pombal, who throughout the world
> Has brought glory to his homeland,
> With profound knowledge
> And an elevated spirit,
> Reveals your great designs
> To the world in brilliant deeds. (6)

The figure of the "illustrious minister," like his actions, which give form to the king's ideas, reflects a broader humanist tradition of the Portuguese Enlightenment. This image can be traced back to the "new theories" associated with the intellectual circle of Mafra. It took shape during the period when the future Marquis of Pombal supported the publication of Cândido Lusitano's translation of Horace. The same network included José de Oliveira, the translator of Longinus, and Basílio da Gama, who dedicated his poem "O Uruguai" to the State Secretary. There, Carvalho appears as the ideal minister: executor of the king's will, a man of learning and action.[47]

Machado de Castro draws on this same tradition. In it, the monarch is presented with abstract, divine qualities, while the minister becomes the intermediary between ruler and subjects. The Ode places the Marquis beside the king beginning with the stanza in which the Sovereign chooses the Hero.[48] "It is His Excellency the Most Illustrious Marquis of Pombal, represented in the bas-relief of the Pedestal," Machado de Castro writes in a brief note.[49]

The closeness of the minister to the throne reflects not subordination, but recognition. It follows a literary and political logic already developed by contemporary writers – one that was both flattering and ideological.[50] Machado's Ode, in this light, does not imitate but participates in this discourse. It expresses his wish to remain aligned with the "new theories" supported by Pombal and to be counted among those who shared Enlightenment ideals.

Machado de Castro presents the Hero's first great act as the salvation of Portugal after the 1755 earthquake, later called by Voltaire the "Lisbon disaster":

> Illustrious Lusitania groans, exhausted,
> Shaken by the fury from beneath the earth;
> Her life almost slipping away,
> Her breath choked by fear…

---

[47] TEIXEIRA, Ivan. O Uraguay e a poética cultural do mecenato pombalino. Floema, v. 1, n. 2, Dec. 2005, p. 44.
[48] According to scholars, such a solution reflects the *national* character of the project and would have been entirely unthinkable in French royal statues. See: FARIA, *op. cit.*, 2011, p. 78.
[49] CASTRO, *op. cit.*, 1775, p. 4.
[50] Thus, for example, Basílio da Gama affirms the idea of a *harmonious accord* between the king and his minister, while in José de Oliveira's edition of Longinus' "*Treatise on the Sublime*", dedications are addressed jointly to the king and the Marquis of Pombal. See: TEIXEIRA, Ivan. Mecenato pombalino e poesia neoclássica. São Paulo: Edusp, 1999.

But Carvalho, mighty and brave,
Breathes life into her once more – and saves her from death. (7)

This catastrophe marked the rise of the future Marquis of Pombal. In the wake of the disaster, he effectively took control of the government. He orchestrated political trials against powerful noble families, most notably through the fabricated Távora plot and the alleged assassination attempt on the king, and oversaw the expulsion of the Jesuit order. Once the two main political forces – the Jesuits and the aristocracy – had been removed, Pombal began reforming the economy. Royal power would no longer to rely on the support of the Church and nobility, but on a new foundation of trade and enterprise.

If the king, as we have seen, stands above the daily concerns of his subjects, then his minister becomes the model of civic virtue. Praises offered to Pombal both before and around the time of the Ode forms part of a broader cultural script. As scholars note, such texts "should be read as a key element in the social discourse of the period… History functions like a kind of 'ars poetica', establishing a norm… the texts, in miniature, belong to history as part of a larger discourse." [51]

The Ode draws on this tradition. It combines historical references with the literary codes of Pombal's circle to construct a mythic world. The Illustrious Hero – "mighty Atlas" – supports the King against aristocratic conspirators, who "appear, threatening," and against the Jesuits, described as "infernal furies." Once "happiness returns" and "holy peace descends" on Lusitania, the Hero helps the King restore order. He reforms the empire and oversees the reconstruction of Lisbon.

What power, what skill, what swiftness in their task!
As if great beams took flight into the sky!
Defying Nature,
Whole mountains seem to move!
The work is surging, and Lisbon
Is sung by Fame as a miracle of art. (18)

The reconstruction of Lisbon became a visible symbol of national renewal. Under the future Marquis of Pombal, who personally oversaw the work, the original plan for the main square included both a triumphal arch and a royal statue facing the river. By 1760, when the pedestal's foundation was laid, the project was abandoned. It was revived only after key reforms had been completed. Carvalho e Melo received the title of Count of Oeiras in 1759 for his role in suppressing the aristocratic conspiracy and became Marquis of Pombal in 1770. That same year, Machado de Castro began work on the statue.

[51] TEIXEIRA, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

The Ode reflects this political and symbolic moment. Twelve central stanzas recount the 25-year reign of King D.José I, known as the Reformer. The final five stanzas are devoted to the monument. Here, the structure of the poem remains consistent: it catalogues the king's actions. The statue appears only at the end only, in the final lines, where its position gives it both rhetorical and symbolic weight:

> From the Royal Throne look upon Your Portrait,
> Which I dedicate to You in numerous lines,
> That it might come to life (26)

When the king encounters his sculpted likeness in the final lines of the Ode, the historical narrative reaches both its culmination and its threshold. It halts and crystallizes in the form of a statue.

The monument itself, which Machado de Castro would later describe as an "epic poem," had already been completed by the time the Ode was written. What the poem presents is its idealized version. In this context, the doubling of the monument in language can be understood as a way of securing the artwork's continued existence. The poem thus serves a second, unspoken purpose: it preserves the statue not only as an image of the sovereign, but as a work of art in its own right. Through the Ode, the sculptor-poet asserts the value of the completed monument – not simply as execution, but as the outcome of his own creative revisions.

The Marquis of Pombal insisted that the elements of the sketch be transferred into the model part by part. In this sense, the drawing functioned as a detailed program for the monument. There is no need to review the many well-documented examples of such programs. What matters is that the Prime Minister approached the monument through the lens of rhetoric and epic structure, in line with the classical tradition shaped by Horace's *Ars Poetica*.

For the sculptor, this principle was necessary, but not sufficient:

> The Epic Poet, while satisfying the precepts of his Art, is forced to content the understanding of the learned Reader. The Sculptor or Painter, by likewise following the precepts of his Art, is forced to satisfy both the intellect and the eyes of the spectators, not only individually, part by part, but at a single glance.

He adds: "In this case, I do not know which is more difficult, Poetry or Drawing".[52]

As for the minister, such difficulties were unknown to him – even in theory. For Machado de Castro, they were a matter of lived artistic practice. The minister's authority, exercised through strict

[52] CASTRO, *op. cit.*, 2025, p. 71-72.

censorship, prohibited any changes to elements of the sketch that had once been "approved" – even if they now seemed outdated. These elements, in rhetorical terms, continued to please "the understanding of the learned Reader". In contrast, the few changes that were permitted had emerged only after 1759. They followed the "new theories" and the logic of emerging neoclassical doctrine, aiming to satisfy "the eyes of the spectators at a single glance".[53]

From this disparate collection of parts, Machado de Castro succeeded in creating a coherent artistic whole. He carefully adjusted the statue and the side groups to correspond with one another, forming a unified image of the king-as-warrior. For the sculptor, this was above all an act of "protection and patronage" – the most patriotic message the monument could convey, as he repeatedly emphasized. It was this narrative that he saw as the true unifying principle of the sculptural ensemble.

According to the sculptor himself, the iconographic elements "contribute to the expression of the overall idea." For this reason, the iconography deserves focused analysis. Machado de Castro depicts the king as an equestrian figure in military armor and a crested helmet. The martial theme continues in the side allegorical groups, which show defeated *prisoners of war*, and in the trophies surrounding the club of Hercules – a recognized symbol of royal power.

This is the same warrior-king who appears in the Ode during the account of the expulsion of the Jesuits and the Távora conspiracy:

> Calmly mount the spirited beast –
> Lusitanian Alcides, Hercules, is on your side.
> Now strike down with pride
> The serpent's venom,
> Dealing blows of terrible force
> To drive out the hated monsters. (10)
>
> Fall, disgraceful Treason,
> Deception, Slander, Envy weaving its schemes,
> Furious Arrogance –
> Captives of the Stygian waters;
> Together with War,
> At last the land of Lusitania is freed from poison. (11)

The king is indeed portrayed as a warrior. The imagery includes Hercules (the "Lusitanian Alcides"), "captives of the Stygian waters," and "war itself." Yet all of this was already present in the original sketch that depicted the monarch as heir to the earlier military glory of the Portuguese empire and as the

[53] Michael Fried shows that the "momentality" is a breakthrough in French aesthetic theory that insisted on grasping the spectator. FRIED, Michael. **Absorption and Theatricality**: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot. [*S. l.*]: University of California Press, 1980.

recent (as of 1759) victor over the Great Earthquake. In this logic, triumph over natural disaster continues the sequence of past military victories.

Later, Machado de Castro noted that the architect had borrowed a "composition that caught his eye" from Blondel's album, drawing specifically from unrealized designs for the triumphs of Louis XIV by Charles Perrault and Charles Le Brun.[54] The war theme – the first element strictly protected from alteration – remained intact in the final monument. It continued to function as a generalized allegory of past victories: "Portugal at various times won glorious battles." While the theme remained unchanged, the figures were redrawn and proportions adjusted.

Machado de Castro sought to give the king a more modern image – meaning a more classicizing one – and, for patriotic reasons, to shift the focus away from Louis XIV and toward D. José I as "the Reformer." He successfully removed the lion beneath the horse, replacing it with a tangle of serpents trampled under the hooves.[55] [Figure 5] The king's figure acquired even greater authority when the sculptor added a Roman-style royal mantle over his shoulders – another approved modification. In the allegorical groups, alongside the *war prisoners*, he introduced fully articulated figures of Triumph and Glory. Each assumed a specific role, and the sculptor was granted freedom to determine their proportions.

Unlike the monument, which follows a more conventional heroic model, the Ode interprets the king's image through the lens of recent political events. Machado de Castro casts the Marquis of Pombal in the role of earthquake-savior, while war takes on a specific meaning: it refers to the campaign against the conspirators and Jesuits accused of plotting to assassinate the king.

Describing the Hero-King's shining armor:

> Oh, how brightly gleams the stately Mass,
> Graced by the Effigy that gilds the bronze! […] (22)

[54] CASTRO, *op. cit.*, 2025, p. 361-362.

[55] In the anti-Jesuit propaganda campaign that accompanied the expulsion of the Society of Jesus from Portugal, serpentine symbolism was widely used for negative characterization. It is unclear to what extent Machado de Castro intended a direct allusion to this imagery in the iconography of the snakes on the monument, but references to anti-Jesuit rhetoric are clearly present. One notable example is an engraving by Joaquim Carneiro da Silva and Eleutério Manuel de Barros.


**Figure 5:**
Joaquim Carneiro da Silva (engrav.) after Eleutério Manuel de Barros (artist). **Allegory for the Equestrian Statue of King Joseph I:** Immortality, in the form of a majestic angel, crowns Lusitania, personified as a male figure trampling the Jesuits, depicted as serpents, 1775 (?). Engraving. Available from: https://am.uc.pt/item/49266


**Figure 6:**
Joaquim Machado de Castro, **The design for the bas-relief of the statue**. In: CASTRO, Joaquim Machado de. **Descripção analytica da execução da estatua equestre, erigida em Lisboa a gloria do Senhor Rei Fidelissimo D. José I**. Lisboa: Imp. Regia, 1810.

Machado explains in a commentary that this refers to "the white armor, meant to suggest the hero's strength, with which His Majesty defended his people against the dangerous forces (*máquinas*) that sought to destroy the Monarchy." In this reading, the monument itself takes on a new function: the warrior-king is transformed into a lawgiver – a figure grounded in political action and reform.[56]

In the same note, Machado describes the bas-relief on the pedestal, listing the allegorical figures and explaining their meaning. Though completed after the statue's inauguration and after the publication of the Ode, the relief held special meaning for the sculptor. It embodied what he saw as the true purpose of the monument: the king's protective role. This, for Machado, was the most patriotic and contemporary message the sculpture could deliver. What inspired him most, he writes, was "the generosity with which the Sovereign [...] concurred and ordered the reedification of his almost completely ruined Capital City."[57]

Thus, Royal Generosity appears at the center of the relief, as described by the sculptor himself. She is shown as a crowned female figure on the Throne "dressed in majestic robes", while the City is represented as a woman collapsing at her feet. The City holds a shield with the emblem of the Lisbon Senate – "to show who she is." Next to Royal Generosity stands the Hero ("Government"), helping the City to rise. He is supported by Love of Virtue, another allegorical figure. On the other side of the throne, Human Providence and Architecture "discuss the plan for the City's reedification," while Commerce "dressed according to the ancient custom of the Portuguese" places gifts at the feet of Generosity. Notably, instead of the traditional figure of Mercury, Machado de Castro chooses to depict a merchant.[58]

In spatial terms, the relief is the most distant element from the central statue of the king. It occupies a marginal position on the back of the pedestal. Because it was not part of the original sketch, Machado de Castro designed it independently. [Figure 6] For him, this stone *tableau* expressed the monument's full meaning – far more clearly than the original model, which he considered incoherent. The relief becomes, in this sense, a pure statement of *Art*.

More than that, Machado conceived the relief as having a structural role. He intended it to reflect the monument's main theme and to correct what he saw as weaknesses in the side groups. In his view, it ties the separate parts of the ensemble together and clarifies their meaning. The relief's marginal position

[56] CASTRO, *op. cit.*, 1775, p. 10. Machado de Castro likely adapted his vision to contemporary monumental sculpture, where the figure of the king as warrior had already given way to that of the protector and legislator, as in Edmé Bouchardon's monument to Louis XV at the Place de la Concorde in Paris.

[57] *Idem*, *op. cit.*, 2025, p. 250.

[58] The figure resembles a character actor distinguished by a jacket contrasting with the draped garments of the others. Despite the abstract nature of the classical (or pseudo-classical) attire, the figures clearly follow models from Cesare Ripa's "*Iconologia*". According to the catalogue of Machado de Castro's library, he owned two editions of Ripa (1603 and 1669). See: FARIA, *op. cit.*, 2008, p. 175.

in the monument is echoed in the Ode, where it appears only in a commentary. Like the earlier note on "Poetry and Art," this second commentary is long, technical, and heavily erudite. Both notes stand apart from the main poem and focus entirely on visual art.

But does an Ode need commentary at all?

**Three. The History of Melpomene**

The idea of doubling between poem and monument finds its clearest expression in the commentaries attached to the Ode. These notes expand the poem beyond its main structure. They bring it into direct contact with the monument and its making.

However, the commentaries do more than explain sculptural elements: they also introduce situations related to the creative process. Some describe figures actually represented in the monument, others refer to ideas or episodes that remained unrealized. Together, they construct a parallel narrative of artistic intention, revision, and authorship.

The final and most ambiguous commentary follows the stanza describing "ornamented bronze":

> The Fairest work that Foundry's art has shaped,
> A living fountain rising into flame,
> Carrying da Costa's Fame
> Swiftly across the World. (22)

Machado writes: "Brigadier Bartolomeu da Costa, a rare man who undertook this project for the glory of the Portuguese Nation, told me that among the many praises he received, he did not think it right to accept those that placed me below him. I had more reason to be considered first in this work, since the Foundry revealed everything that Sculpture had already achieved."[59] This comment points not just to an aesthetic judgment, but to a moment of professional tension. The story is not told in the poem itself: it appears only in the margins as part of the commentary.

The sculptor, Machado de Castro, was notably absent from the public inauguration of the monument. The ceremony emphasized the technical success of the bronze casting rather than the artistic work behind it. The Ode may be read, in part, as his response to this marginalization.

To understand the context, we must return to the circumstances that gave rise to both the statue and Machado de Castro's poem – and, perhaps, to the peculiar tone of his final commentary. As noted

[59] CASTRO, *op. cit.*, 1775, p. 10.

earlier, the monument was inaugurated on June 6, 1775, the birthday of King D. José I. The statue was unveiled in Lisbon's main square during a grand celebration. The event was organized at the initiative of the Marquis of Pombal, who had commissioned the monument as a gift to honor his king and patron.

By this time – just two years before his forced resignation – the Prime Minister had consolidated control over the key mechanisms of government, including public messaging and symbolic representation. [60] As part of this effort, he actively shaped his own image as the true pillar of the monarchy. This intention manifested, for example, in the medallion bearing his portrait at the base of the royal statue. It was the circle of humanists under his patronage that established and promoted the symbolic association between the king and his minister. As a result, Pombal's actions were framed with the highest possible dignity afforded to a royal servant. Among the many celebratory texts published for the monument's inauguration, several sonnets by Basílio da Gama famously compare the minister to Alexander the Great. [61] In this same tradition, Machado de Castro's *Ode* praises the "Illustrious Hero" – the king's envoy – as a national benefactor, a "brother of Lusitania," and moral counterpart to the sovereign.

Yet despite this rhetorical continuity, the sculptor's own position was far more precarious. The *Ode* was composed in an atmosphere of limited agency and institutional control. It followed the ideals promoted by Pombal – the same aesthetic values Machado had absorbed years earlier in Mafra – but the circumstances surrounding its writing were anything but empowering. At the statue's official inauguration, the sculptor was excluded from the ceremonial ranks. He was denied access to the reserved areas and had to remain among the general public – witnessing the unveiling of his own work from the crowd.

In the Ode, Machado de Castro claims to have achieved "eternal honor" by creating the statue of the king – the "Image of the Sovereign." In practice, however, the commission brought him no such recognition. King D. José I even refused to sit for the sculptor. This refusal likely reflected several factors: the king's discomfort with the unfamiliar idea of a civic monument, his reluctance to engage with the *craft* of sculpture, and perhaps a barely concealed disapproval of his minister's initiative.

At the official unveiling, Machado's role as royal sculptor was defined in minimal, technical terms. The Marquis of Pombal publicly referred to "Joaquim Machado, the Portuguese sculptor who *made the model of the statue*" (italics mine – O.R.). In other words, the sculptor was relegated to mere execution – the same craft-oriented aspect emphasized in the Ode itself. The minister claimed the creative initiative for

[60] MAXWELL, Kenneth. Pombal: Paradox of the Enlightenment. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995; TAVARES, Rui. O pequeno livro do grande terramoto: Ensaio sobre 1755. Lisboa: Edições Tinta-da-china, 2005.

[61] ESTATUA EQUESTRE. [Lisboa]: [Na Régia Oficina Tipográfica], [1775]. Previously accessible through the "Brasiliana" digital library: http://www.brasiliana.usp.br/bbd/handle/1918/03911600. The convolute is currently unavailable.

himself, presenting the monument as his own project conceived in the name of the king. Writing years later, in exile and in the third person, Pombal recalled:

> This minister was desirous of offering to the government a noble monument that might preserve his name for future generations... To this purpose, he gave command for the erection of a magnificent bronze statue of the king, his sovereign and patron. The wish of the Marquis of Pombal was thereby accomplished. The inauguration of the statue, raised in honor of the king, left upon all the impression it was meant to produce.[62]

The artistic problem arose, paradoxically, from non-artistic circumstances. Machado de Castro was prohibited from modifying the narrative program of the monument.[63] He was not allowed to remove or add any elements to the sculptural ensemble. Yet unlike his patrons, he believed that each component possessed not only narrative function but also visual and formal value. His efforts, therefore, focused on emphasizing the aesthetic coherence of the composition. The changes he proposed, such as adjustments in proportion, greater plastic articulation of the figures, unmistakably reflect the approach of an artist rather than that of an artisan [Figure 7, Figure 8].

Notably, Machado de Castro was not even named among the principal authors of the monument. He would later address this omission in his "Descrição analítica". The fact that he returned to the episode many years later suggests that the exclusion left a lasting impression. Still, he found a way to respond – without directly naming those in power.

Among the celebratory texts written for the occasion was a speech by António Pereira de Figueiredo – grammarian, Enlightenment reformer, and royal censor under Pombal. Entitled O Dia das tres Inaugurações ("The Day of Three Birthdays"), the speech listed symbolic events: the king's birthday; the renaming of the square, framed as the birth of a "New Lisbon, risen from ashes, standing above its former ruins"; and, finally, the unveiling of the statue.[64] This last moment, according to Figueiredo, marked the day when "the Most Illustrious Senate expresses the admiration and esteem of the entire Court for the great master of the Arts and of chemical processes, the Portuguese Engineer. This statue has no equal in size, elegance, or execution – a vast and proud Effigy, cast in a single piece."

---

[62] MELO, Sebastien-Joseph de Carvalho et. **Memoires de Sebastien-Joseph de Carvalho et Melo, comte d'Oeyras, marquis de Pombal, secretaire d'etat et premier ministre du roi de Portugal Joseph I**. Lisbonne: chez B. Le Franq., 1784, p. 59.

[63] An exception was the figure of the lion beneath the horse, which was replaced by a mass of serpents — a clear ideological topos.

[64] FIGUEIREDO, António Pereira de. **O Dia das tres Inaugurações. Breve discurso sobre a Regia função do dia 6 de Junho de 1775, dirigido ao Escellentissimo Conde de Oeiras.** Lisboa: Régia Oficina Tipográfica, 1775.


**Figure 7:**
Eugénio dos Santos, **The design for the statue**. In: CASTRO, Joaquim Machado de. **Descripção analytica**, 1810.


**Figure 8:**
Joaquim Machado de Castro, **The design for the statue**. In: CASTRO, Joaquim Machado de. **Descripção analytica**, 1810.

António Pereira de Figueiredo wrote several more speeches for the occasion, all dedicated to the king and his monument. In none of them did he mention Machado de Castro. Instead, he gave full credit to the foundryman, the military engineer Bartolomeu da Costa. Nearly forty years later, Machado recalled the episode: "It did not occur to some of our learned men – no more than to common people – to reflect on the role a sculptor plays in a work of this kind. Our educated António Pereira de Figueiredo (though no one can know everything) called [engineer da Costa] a celebrated sculptor on that occasion." [65]

Machado adds that he wished to "free Figueiredo and others from the ignorance or error in which they remained regarding this matter." This, he says, was part of the reason he wrote the Ode. In telling the story, he quotes the first two stanzas of the poem – and the final four. By 1813, when he recalled these events, King D. José I was long dead. Under Queen Maria, Pombal had fallen from power and been exiled. His portrait was removed from the base of the statue, and all stanzas in the Ode referring to his role during

[65] CASTRO, Joaquim Machado de. Memoria sobre a Estatua Equestre do Senhor Rei D.José I. **Jornal de Coimbra**, v. II, p. 431-432, 1813.

the reign were eliminated. The revised version, published in the "*Coimbra Journal*", became a commentary on the official "text of history."

In composing the Ode, Machado de Castro did more than honor the king. He preserved his own authorship at a moment when it was being systematically erased. The poem became a parallel monument – not in stone and bronze, but in verse – securing his place within the historical and artistic narrative he helped to construct.

**Conclusion: The Ode as an Eternal Monument**

This article has examined the Ode as both a performative utterance and a form of ekphrasis – a poetic structure that illuminates the "hidden meaning" of the royal monument. One interpretive layer celebrates the king's presence through the image of the "colossal statue." A second preserves the monument as a work of art, shaped by the "new theories" promoted by the Marquis of Pombal. A third reorients the rhetorical gesture: what begins as praise of the sovereign becomes, gradually, praise of the artist.

Denied recognition at the time of the inauguration, Machado de Castro returned to the Ode many years later. He republished the text, reinforcing its performative function and affirming his authorship. This final act introduces a fourth interpretive dimension: the poem as a medium through which the sculptor reclaims his place in history.

For Machado, poetry offered what sculpture could not: the ability to inscribe the creator alongside the creation. It is no coincidence that the most enduring poetic text of the 18$^{th}$ century, apart from Horace's "Ars Poetica", was his ode "To Melpomene" – also known by its first words: "Exegi monumentum".