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FALCONERS FACING THEIR UNESCO ACKNOWLEDGMENT

ETHICS TO SAFEGUARD THE FALCONRY HERITAGE

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For centuries and in countries all over the world falconry has not had any great changes. However, the acknowledgment of falconry by the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage ICH is a milestone in history. Due to this, and by stopping and observing the situation, we can identify different results that mark the present and the near future of falconry.

The main objective of this article is as a means of reflection, in the international falconry community, about both the changes that are occurring in our field, falconry, and the concept and perception of falconry.

Falconry can be defined as the art of caring for and training of birds of prey to hunt wild quarry in their natural environment. This means that falconry is hunting and, therefore, if the wild quarry is not captured and killed, the activity performed cannot be considered falconry.

It has been this way for thousands of years. For this reason, the ties between human beings and the bird of prey has remained alive. Neither religion, race, culture nor socio-economic status are important. Whoever has managed to train a bird of prey and hunt with it has experienced emotions and has nurtured values that provide that person with an identity. The person becomes a member of what we could call the falconry community.

The multinational candidacy before UNESCO has made this interesting reality flourish. Through their birds falconers all over the world share a common identity. Falconry can be considered a way of uniting nations. Through history, living beings that are apparently "small" creatures, such as falcons, have been able to stop wars or have served as diplomatic presents between different governments. When one falconer is going to bed, on the other side of the world the dreams of another falconer are rising. The falconry tradition has been overflying the earth without any man-made barriers for more than 4000 years.

Looking at the cultural goods that UNESCO has established as ICH it comes to our attention that most of them correspond to one specific country or even to one specific geographical area. The opposite happens with falconry. It is amazing that



If the goal of our activity is not hunting, then we are not talking about falconry.



UAE, through its leadership in the Multinational Submission to UNESCO, and the organization of the International Falconry Festival has shown how falconry provides a common identity to falconers from many different cultures.

falconers, even though they belong to such different cultures, feel this common identity that has remained the same through time.

While reflecting on the causes I encountered several arguments.

Falconers find happiness while devoting their life to an occupation to which they have a particular vocation. We have discovered and recognized it voluntarily and freely. We practice it more for the satisfaction it provides us with than for the material goods we get from it. That it provides us with happiness does not mean that it constantly gives us pleasure. In fact, those difficulties are what make it attractive. Falconry entails so many sacrifices that whoever practices it immediately discovers the complicities of their encounter with other falconers. The situation can be compared to the encounter of two mothers that immediately connect while talking about their babies.

Falconry rediscovers in human beings their ties with nature. A falconer in the countryside is a hunter with two legs and two wings. We have this concept so fully integrated that when we go out to the countryside we do not say "I am going to fly my bird" but instead "I am going to fly". We reach the third dimension, the vertical one, and see the land we are going to hunt through the falcon that is overflying us.

The falconer looks through the eyes of his goshawk or falcon. Knows its capabilities. Examines the launching conditions fast in order to let the bird fly or wait for a better moment. The falconer forms a team with his bird. Unlike a naturalist

that remains as a spectator behind the binoculars, the falconer is part of a team. The falconer participates in the life cycle of the ecosystem where he is. The falconer is the director of an orchestra in which the symphony is performed differently every day. A Bird, human being (and sometimes dog or/and horse/camel) could read their music sheet themselves but they prefer the harmony of putting all their abilities together. The challenge, and therefore also the greater or less great satisfaction are conditioned by the difficulty of the launch. The falconer does not try to control the variables but instead he tries to adapt to them. The ignorance previous to the result, the uncertainty, creates the motivation to cover hundreds of kilometers in order to reach the reserve and hunt a partridge, hare or rabbit.

Here lies one of the greatneses of falconry. The person is face to face with nature in its pure state because the difficulty does not come from him but from the ability that the bird of prey has to escape. Thousands of years of evolution have provided each species with the necessary resources to survive the attack of its predator. Both the rabbit that is chased by our goshawk and the duck that escapes our falcon are risking their lives. Our success practicing falconry will be determined by a factor that does not depend on the person, the prey. The specimen dodges because it risks its life daily while successfully escaping its natural predators; it uses all its resources to also escape the falconry bird. The challenge is to manage to coordinate the efforts and the capabilities to win the game. Every time we go out to hunt we undergo, as



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a team, the test of survival. For the prey being killed means it failed. For the team not having been successful when hunting has consequences that can be easily accepted. We always find satisfaction in the excitement of hunting and in the simple fact of all of us returning home.

A falconer gets to know himself better when he rediscovers his ties with the natural environment. Through falconry a person finds an activity that makes him noble. I do not mean with this that a person reaches a better social status. In fact, the best falconers are usually people that are close to the countryside and who do not like the big cities' ostentations. Falconry awakens and intensifies in a person his more noble values. The relationship with a bird of prey, as we well know,



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is not based on a hierarchy or in the punishment but instead in the positive subtlety and reinforcement. In fact, it is not the bird that is at a person's disposition but the person who is at the disposition of the bird. This is why falconry is also defined as *the art through which the birds of prey use and extract the best part of human beings*. This attitude towards the service, compromised until death separates the falconer and the bird, says a lot about the altruism and dedication of the falconers, even more when there is no economic compensation. On the contrary, having hunting land, a means of transportation, facilities in which to keep the bird and the most difficult of all, time daily to fly, require a considerable economic effort.

The bird of prey builds in a person abilities and values such as confidence, patience, discernment, observation, sensibility, global perception of the environment, humility, planning of strategies, being unconditional, selflessness, compromise, respect, etc. Falconry awakens one's own humanity and therefore it discovers a person's more noble essence. In the Medieval Ages falconry was considered the best field in which to educate gentlemen. It trained them to ride, understand the orography of the land, coordinate teams, make fast decisions, develop strategies, etc. For this reason it is not surprising that celebrities from the International Olympics Movement as important as Carl Diem or Dr. Misangyi have reasoned about how the practice of falconry has given place to the term "sport".

All these abilities could later be applied in the battlefield. Whoever trained a gentle falcon was called a "gentleman",



nowadays this falcon is known as a peregrine falcon. Many centuries later the term continues to define, in the modern world, a person who has obtained noble qualities, independently of the fact that the person cares for a falcon or not.

Gotten to this point, we can introduce a subject to reflect on and that is currently common. In different nations many enthusiasts (now I do not use the term falconers) care for and train birds of prey but they do not hunt with them. They care for the specimen and use techniques that falconers also use. However, what were initially considered temporary resources for the training and bodybuilding of the birds, with the objective of later introducing them into hunting, constitutes an end in itself. With this approach they achieve spectacular ascending flight to lure hung from air balloons or tied on kites and even hunting lure dragged by remote-controlled aircrafts. In other cases they release jesses for their falcons with the only objective of observing bird dives from the highest height possible. The trainer does not need to blend into the landscape and therefore a large crowd of people can see the flights.

However, going back to the topic of falconry, in force for more than 4000 years, falconry is hunting. Consequently, whoever does not hunt or does not have the intention of hunting can be considered a magnificent trainer of birds but not a falconer. That person has preferred to control the flight more than the uncertainty created by the escape of a wild prey. José Ortega y Gasset in his wonderful text about hunting (1942) reflects on an issue that is worth mentioning. *"... Hunting is an imitation of the animal. Therefore we will not be understanding hunting if we take it as a human fact and not as a zoological fact that man takes delight in producing."*

Modern society does not make the life of falconers easy. It encourages us to continuously obtain the greatest quantity of product possible, without much effort, in a little amount of time and if possible with a large public. Falconry does not fulfill any of these requirements. To hunt a few dozens of specimen in a season requires a great effort and a dedication of 365 days a year. The witness of success is oneself and at the most a companion. A falconer enjoys flying alone; the person does not need someone else's acknowledgement to feel fully satisfied. Also, a falconer does not need the judges

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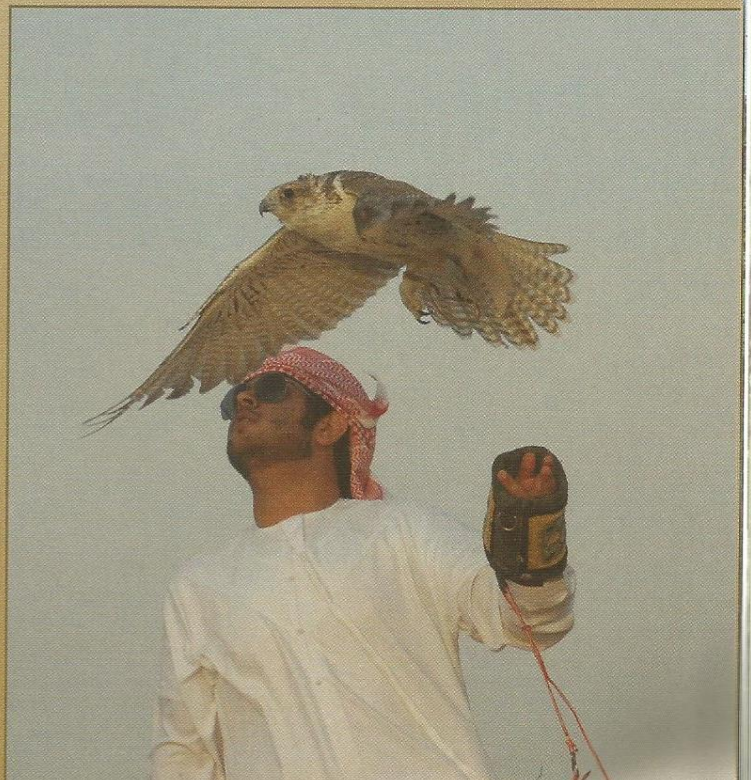
Every time we go out to hunt we undergo, as a team, the test of survival. The falconer participates in the life cycle of the ecosystem where he is.

of a competition to verify if a good falconry takes place or not. A falconer's own sport moral, the person's falconry ethics, shows if the launch has been noble with the prey, with their bird and with himself.

Nevertheless, falconry is not exempt from the contamination of the aforementioned values proposed by society.

The media, immediate access to information, breeding centers, the welfare state and other factors, make it easy to buy a bird of prey for anyone who is willing to pay some money for it.

Instead of taking into account all the implications that are present when hunting with a bird of prey the new amateurs first buy it, then train it and then they complain about not having a hunting reserve available. The birds remain in



their perches “to use them for breeding” and in less worse cases they fly to hunt game birds. It increases the number of bird of prey before the public, in medieval markets, prey competitions or contests that measure the speed of falcons. In these cases nature is not the challenge anymore but instead it is the altimeter, speed or the captured prey that almost does not have the possibility to escape. The uncertainty of the death gives place to routine. The task of interpreting the natural hunting environment is substituted by the challenge of achieving more meters of height or fewer seconds in the distance traveled. Now it is not a matter of witnessing nature but the artificial. The goal is to control the situation in every possible way in order to reach a measure or a score in a competition. The rivalry between falconers awakens and at the same time attractive prizes nurture it. The integration of a person in nature is anecdotal. The person looks for the first piece of open land to shorten the travel time, avoid hunting search efforts and not have to pay the hunting reserve.

When switching the attention from what is natural to what is artificial the falconer's gaze is lost. Even though there are many common elements with falconry now we are not talking about the same thing. It is not the same to hunt with than to train birds.

With this I do not mean that I am against the competitions



Falconry transcends our existence. It makes us the link in the human chain that for more than four thousand years has found a style of life in the ties we have with the winged creature.



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of birds of prey in flight. I believe that if they are well organized, with critical speakers and with quarry that are difficult to capture, as carrier pigeons can be, they can carry out interesting functions of bringing the birds of prey close to society. We must keep in mind that society is influenced by whatever is spectacular and involves a large crowd. These activities, such as exhibitions of prey in flight, competitions or medieval markets that come from falconry have such a large public that they have good media coverage. Therefore, to see a man with a bird on their fist is known as falconry. It is apparently difficult to distinguish between who is a falconer and who is a bird trainer. On the other hand, it is as difficult as to presence if a man (or a woman) hunts wild quarry with their bird of prey.

We can apply Hegel's idea of “*in art shape is depth*” to falconry.

In the way we relate to each other and how we fly our birds we experience those values and emotions that counterweigh our efforts.

In every human activity excellence in its practice is the pillar for it to survive.

Our way of understanding falconry is going to determine our behavior. If by falconry we understand hunting then we are witnesses of the heritage that is acknowledged by UNESCO. We have the privilege and responsibility of maintaining it alive. Falconry transcends our existence. It makes us the link in the human chain that for more than four thousand years has found a style of life in the ties we have with the winged creature.

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MANUAL BÁSICO Y ÉTICO DE CETRERÍA



It is time to identify the good practices of a falconer. To establish a code of ethics that gathers all the common points that must be taken into account by everyone who practices falconry in order to reestablish the basis of the falconry community. http://www.mcu.es/novedades/2011/novedades_Patrimonio_Cetreria.html

establish a code of ethics that gathers all the common points that must be taken into account by everyone who practices falconry in order to reestablish the basis of the falconry community. This does not mean that other ways of understanding the ties with the birds of prey must be left aside, such as training without a hunting purpose or flight exhibitions and competitions. It means that it is important to work on the feeling of belonging to the falconry community. Discover that our passion has also been lived by our ancestors many generations ago and that it depends on us for it to stay this way.

Dr. Félix Rodríguez de la Fuente (1965) captured this message in an extraordinary manner:

"Falconry is not only a differentiated hunting system but it is also the art that has driven human beings into reaching the deepest and strongest ties with the animal. For this reason, falcon brother, when once more, with the bird on your fist, at daybreak, you go out to hunt that specimen

that always seems like the first one and in reality could be the last one, take into account that your emotions reflect one-hundred thousand years of powerful hunters".

A good strategy to maintain the falconry heritage legacy consists on identifying possible representative figures in each of the communities. In the profession they are known as "masters of falconry". The name is not give to someone who knows a lot but to whoever teaches and becomes renown. When meeting masters of falconry it is not difficult to put to practice the common elements that are specific to falconry. This is how the task of teaching the good practices to the rest of the falconers is significantly optimized and simplified.

It is also adequate to accurately inform society. For this it is necessary to identify the speakers. It is not easy to find people who know about falconry very well and that also know how to talk about it rigorously and in an attractive way. By planning the messages depending on the type of public and the chosen means the efficiency of the presentations is significantly improved.

As the UNESCO Convention (Paris, 2003) states, in order to safeguard ICH it is necessary to identify and start measures such as identifying, documenting, investigating preserving, promoting, value, transmitting (basically through formal and non-formal education) and revitalizing the heritage in its different aspects. This is not invented from one day to another but instead it requires a global strategic plan in each nation. So there is a lot of work ahead. In the case of falconry a specific consulting job difficult for the governments to recognize is necessary. Lets hope that in the end UNESCO demands it. Falconers from different countries face the problems and therefore we are constantly learning from each other. We have many educational resources, texts with a set of rules, experience in creating associations, a background in relations with the administrations, etc. Putting all this knowledge in common in a coordinated way makes safeguarding falconry easier.

In the XXI century falconers maintain their particular style of life in the diverse and varied places in the world. There are, besides the inherent difficulties of practicing falconry, more serious ones that come from the lack of regulations by each government. We are in time of consolidating the acknowledgment of falconry in UNESCO and in society. The concept that people can have about falconry, currently and in the future, is a task that corresponds to falconers. As falconers we must keep on flying high up in order for anyone who does not fly to discover that in falconry there are no frontiers. 