

# Bullfighting and history

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Since civilisation, humans entertain themselves in typical and traditional ways. Bullfighting is one of them and a part of Hipicculture. Bullfighting is a national sport and spectacle of Spain. It is called the *corrida de toros* in Spanish; the bullfight takes place in a large outdoor arena known as the *plaza de toros*. The object is for one of the bullfighters (*toreros*) the *matador* to kill a wild bull, or *toro*, with a sword. At best, the term “ bullfighting” is a misnomer, a confused, maimed, psychologically tormented, and physically debilitated bull. Supporters justify the act by calling it a tradition.

Opponents maintain that no matter what its history, bullfighting is the torture, mutilation, and slaughter of animals for entertainment. Bullfighting can be traced back to ancient days. They were popular spectacles in ancient Rome, but it was in the Iberian Peninsula that these contests were fully developed by the Moors from North Africa who overran Andalucia in AD 711. Bullfighting developed into a ritualistic occasion observed in connection with feast days, on which the conquering Moors, mounted on highly trained horses, confronted and killed the bulls.

The Minoans of Bronze Age Crete practiced bull leaping as part of religious ritual, and later Greek and Romans also had rites that involved the slaughter of bulls. The Moors, who fought bulls from their horses and killed them with javelins, probably introduced the sport to Spain (c. 11th cent. ). Originally the central figure in the Spanish bullfight was the mounted *torero*; Francisco Romero is generally credited with being the first (c. 1726) to fight on foot. Bullfighting is also popular in the Latin American countries of Mexico, Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador, and in S France.

The Portuguese practice a style of fighting from horseback in which the bull is not killed in the ring. Critics contend that bullfighting is an inhumane spectacle of animal torture; aficionados respond that it is a complex ritual central to Spanish culture. In Spain the bullfight is called the Fiesta Nacional (The national Sport). There are few places in Spain where a bull-ring can not be found within a short drive. It is the most common thing associated with Spain, and rightly so for its origins date back to 711AD when the first bullfight (corrida) took place in honour of the crowning of King Alfons VIII.

Every week, all over Spain, many thousands of Spaniards flock to the nearest bullring, but not all Spaniards agree with the sport, or like it. It is reported that each year, within Spain, 24, 000 bulls are killed in front of an audience of 30 million people. The bullfighting season runs from March to October. Felipe V prohibited the nobles from practicing the sport as he felt it was a bad example for the public's education. From then on the commoners took on the sport, facing the bulls unarmed, dodging and taunting the bull then eventually placing small spears into the bull, the origin of the banderillas of today's bullfights.

Around 1724 the sport was transformed from horseback to foot. The bullfight is literally a dance with death. The bullfighter has to carefully examine and study the movements and strengths of the bull. One wrong move and he will end up gored or seriously injured. It is certain though that at the end of the show, the bull will die, yes, it is literally a show. The bullfighter has to demonstrate his skills to the audience in a dramatic and enthusiastic way. If he makes a good job of it and gets a good round of applause at the end, he

could be bestowed the ultimate honour by being presented with one of the bull's ears or its tail.

If he has been really good he may even be carried round the arena. One variation of the traditional bullfight is bull running where bulls are released into the streets and masses of participants do their best to avoid them and stay alive. Pamplona is the best place to see this. One of the oldest bullrings in Spain is located in the hilltop village of Ronda in Andalucia, southern Spain. It is the venue for one of the most spectacular corridas of the year. In early September the ring hosts a week-end of bullfights in celebration of Pedro Romero, the Saturday corrida being staged in Goyesc costume for which tickets are very hard to obtain.

The bullring in Ronda is open to the public, with a small admission charge. The bullring also houses an interesting museum dedicated to the sport. A modern bullfight consists of three stylized parts (tercios). When the bull enters the ring, toreros wave capes to prod it to charge; then the picadors administer pic (lance) thrusts, which tire the animal and cause him to lower his head; in the second part, the banderilleros come out and, while on the run, plant banderillas on the withers of the bull; these often spur him into making livelier charges.

In the final segment the matador, almost always a man, although some women have entered the sport in recent decades, amid controversy, holds the muleta, a small cloth cape, in one hand, and a sword in the other. Feet Square on the ground and head hung low; the matador must then approach the bull from the front and kill him by thrusting his sword between the shoulder blades and into the heart. A matador's performance requires great

skill and courage and successful matadors reap immense awards in money and adulation. Fighting bulls are bred and selected for spirit and strength.

One of the biggest supporters of bullfighting is the tourist industry. Travel agents and bullfight promoters portray the fight as a festive and fair competition. What they do not reveal is that the bull never has a chance to defend himself, much less to survive. The bulls are intentionally debilitated with sandbags dropped on their backs. (1) One of Spain's bullfighting critics, Joaquin Vidal of El Pais, wrote of drugged bulls at one bullfight, "There was nothing in the arena to fight. The bulls were mostly moribund." (2)

A study conducted by scientists at Spain's Salamanca University found that 20 percent of the bulls used for fighting are drugged before they step into the ring. In the sampling of 200 bulls, one in five had been given anti-inflammatory drugs, which mask injuries that could sap the animal's strength. One common practice is to "shave" the bulls' horns by sawing off a few inches. (3) Bulls' horns, like cats' whiskers, help the animals navigate, so a sudden change impairs their coordination. Shaving is illegal, so a veterinarian sometimes inspects the horns after a fight.

But in 1997, the Confederation of Bullfighting Professionals, including Spain's 230 matadors, went on strike in opposition to these veterinary inspections. The bulls aren't the only victims of the arena. The horses used in bullfights are blindfolded so that they don't become frightened of the charging bull. They are often gored. At the Barcelona Olympics, The Philadelphia Daily News reported, "One time last night, the bull charged the horse, knocked off

the rider, knocked over the horse and got his horn tangled up in all the padding.

The frightened horse, still blindfolded, kicked furiously as it lay on its side. The bull pushed and pulled, shoved and yanked, unable to free itself from the horse's padding. " (4) American author Ernest Hemingway, famous for romanticizing the bullfight ritual, once described the scenes of horses being gored: " I have seen these, call them disembowelling, that is the worst word when, due to their timing, they were very funny. This is the sort of thing you should not admit, but it is because such things have not been admitted that the bullfight has never been explained.

Selective breeding has enabled ranchers to create a bull who will die in a manner most satisfying to the public. Mexican bullfighting also includes " novella," or baby bullfights. The bulls that are used are all less than 3 years old. (5) The Portuguese bullfights that are legal in many U. S. states involve people's teasing and attacking the bull. Eight men, known as " grabbers" line up in front of the bulls to grab the bull's horns, piling on top of the animals and tackling them until they fall to the ground. (6) In Portuguese bullfights in many countries, the bulls are still stabbed with banderillas and have their horns shaved. (7)

Although tormenting and abuse is part of the show, killing must be done outside the arena. In Colombia, there is an annual festival in which solitary bulls are tormented by thousands of people who think they are testing their " bravery" (aided by a festive atmosphere and large quantities of alcohol). " If nobody gets killed, it's boring," laments Carlos Perez, head of the committee

that organized the contest in 1996. But even Colombian bullfighter Luis Cuadrado admits, " It's just one bull against a thousand. morons."

Cuadrado prefers to sit on the ground until the bull is close enough to stab with a lance, after which Cuadrado promptly scurries away to safety. These festivals last four or five days, with at least 35 victimized bulls each day. Pope St. Pius V decreed that bullfights are " altogether foreign to piety and charity. " He wished that " these cruel and disgraceful exhibitions of devils and not of men be abolished" and he forbade attendance at them under pain of excommunication. 8) Even supporters cannot deny that the practice is barbaric.

The Mexican author Eduardo del Rio glorified the maiming of bulls, candidly described bullfighting as " a stumbling block for the humanization of man. " Lyn Sherwood, publisher of a pro-bullfighting magazine, proudly declared, " I have no moral problem promoting something I consider morally unjustifiable. " Most forms of the practice are illegal in the United States because of its inherent cruelty. But tourists, especially from the U. S. , keep bullfighting in business. . According to a 2002 survey by InterGallup S. A. , 69 percent of Spaniards show no interest in bullfights, up from 30 percent in the '90s. (9)

At the same time, more young Hipic people are protesting the crude ritual. In 1995, Madrid was besieged with 5, 000 Spanish demonstrators calling for an end to the practice. Many anti-bullfighting groups have sprung up worldwide, including the Spanish Alternativa para la Liberacion Animal, the Mexican Pena Antitaurina Mexicana, and the Society for the Prevention ofCruelty to Animalsin Tijuana and Mexico City. Spain's Green Party has been working

with the country's Association for the Defence of Animal Rights (ADDA) to have bullfighting banned.

In 1993, a petition drive by the coalition garnered more than 1 million signatures.

References:

- 1) Phil Davison, "Matadors on Horns of a Dilemma," *The Independent*, 12 Feb. 1994.
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- 5) Tony Hendra, "Man and Bull," *Harper's Magazine*, Nov. 1996, Vol. 293, No. 1758, p. 69.