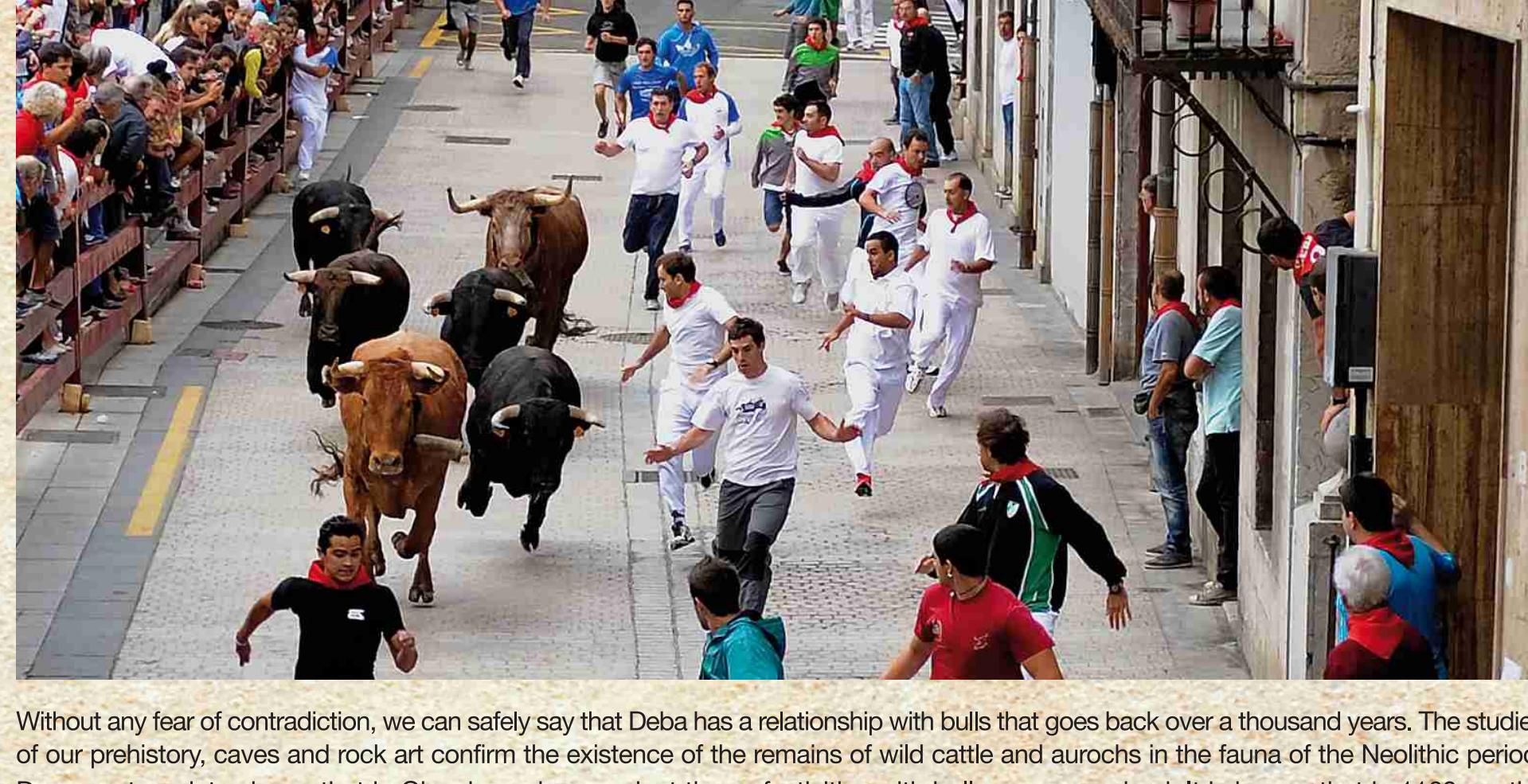


# DEBA AND THE BULLS

## DEBA ET LES TAUREAUX



Without any fear of contradiction, we can safely say that Deba has a relationship with bulls that goes back over a thousand years. The studies of our prehistory, caves and rock art confirm the existence of the remains of wild cattle and aurochs in the fauna of the Neolithic period. Documentary data shows that in Gipuzkoa, since ancient times, festivities with bulls were organised. It is known that in 1160, on the occasion of the visit to Soraluze by the Navarrese King Sancho VI "the Wise", a bull festival was held in which three bulls that the king

had ordered to be captured in the mountains nearby were fought. The first official news concerning bullfights in Deba dates back to 1601 according to accounts book n° 20 (1590-1643) of the Deba Town Hall, in which, among other things, it was pointed out that: "... and three ducados which I pay to Joan de Echaniz in exchange for a bull which was offered to be fought on San Roque's day".

Nowadays, the patron saint festivities are still held on San Roque's Day, the week of the 16th August, when bulls have an essential role to play in the festivities. The bull festival is held in a very old, perfectly square plaza which is set up in the Town Hall Square.

However, in his book *Tradiciones Vasco-Cántabras*, published in 1866, the Deba writer, Juan Venancio Araquistain makes one of the first references to the fact that, in Deba, there had been

bullfights since the Middle Ages. In the book, he relates one of the popular legends of Deba, that of the Alós Tower "Gau-Illa" (*The vigil*), which revolves around some verses which were sung in

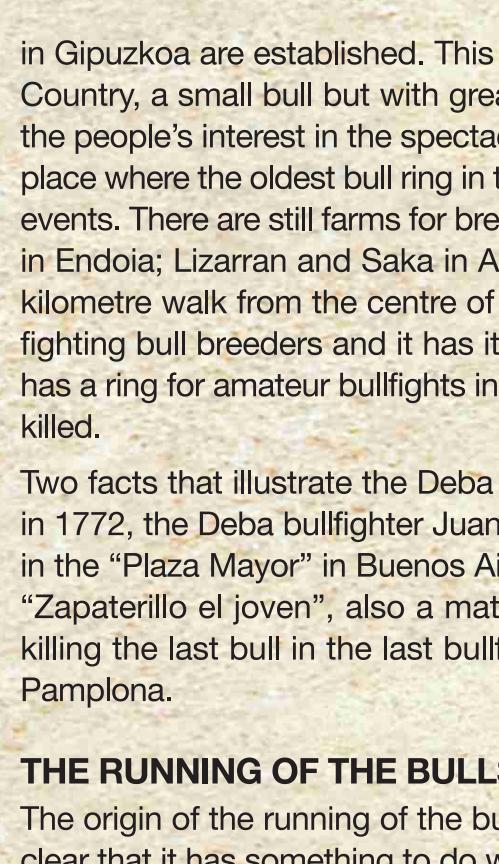
the Deba area in the 15th century: one of the stanzas mentions the game of the bulls to celebrate

the birth of the protagonist of the legend:

*When my good mother split in two to give birth to me,*

*a thousand hens died in the kitchens.*

*Seven bulls were fought in our small square (...)*

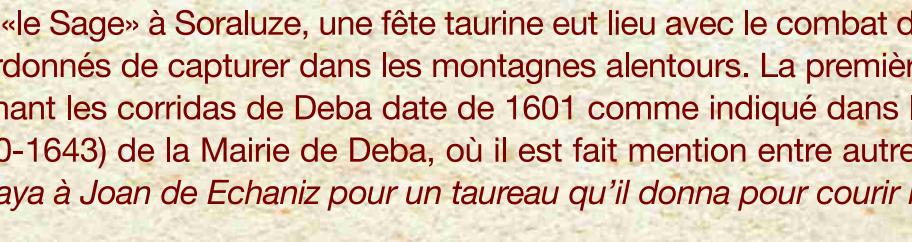


Bulls with padded horns in the bull ring.

Vachettes dans l'arène.

In Gipuzkoa are established. This explains the reason why, from time immemorial, the "betizu", the wild bull, the red bull of the Basque Country, a small bull but with great energy and character abounds in these mountains. With this bull, the first bullfights were held and the people's interest in the spectacle also grew with it. The Lastur bulls are famous throughout the territory and Lastur is the name of the place where the oldest bull ring in the Basque Country is situated. In this bull ring, there are still amateur bullfights and various other taurine events. There are still farms for breeding fighting bulls in Deba: Zelaiuze in Endoia; Lizarran and Saka in Arriola. The latter, which is only a two kilometre walk from the centre of Deba, belongs to the association of fighting bull breeders and it has its own brand. It can be visited and it has a ring for amateur bullfights in which the bullocks or heifers are not killed.

Two facts that illustrate the Deba people's historical passion for bulls: in 1772, the Deba bullfighter Juan Bautista Ituarte "el Vizcaino" fought in the "Plaza Mayor" in Buenos Aires (Argentina). In 1843, José Ituarte "Zapaterillo el joven", also a matador from Deba, had the honour of killing the last bull in the last bullfight held in the Plaza del Castillo in Pamplona.



The bull ring - Les arènes

**THE RUNNING OF THE BULLS**

The origin of the running of the bulls in Deba is unknown but it seems clear that it has something to do with the moving of bullocks from Navarre to Deba. The exact date when the running of the bulls started to take place is also unknown, but apparently, it goes back as far as the last third of the 19th century. At present, Deba is the only town in the Basque Autonomous Community where the running of the bulls takes place with the same bullocks that will be fought in the taurine event on the afternoon of the same day.

The bull run, which starts in the Osio pens, is at a distance of approximately 450 metres from the bull ring, which makes it a brief but exciting, intense, quick spectacle, which, in normal conditions, does not last much more than a minute and a half. It is a run in which there are several sections of different characteristics which are chosen by the runners in accordance with their preferences. Before the bull runs, the bagpipe players and the municipal band march through the streets of the town announcing the festivity and, as it is the custom, they always play the traditional "Dira, dira".

Nous pouvons affirmer sans crainte de nous tromper que Deba a une relation millénaire avec le taureau. Les études de notre préhistoire, de nos grottes et de notre art rupestre, confirment l'existence de restes de bovidés et de l'auroch dans la faune du néolithique.