

Cock Fighting

Category: Legends and traditions

Created: Wednesday, 30 March 2016 17:12 - Last Updated: Wednesday, 11 September 2019 16:00

Written by redpinar

Hits: 2221

~~By Gerardo Ortega.~~

In such a way the Cuban was characterized by the fun of the cockfight, from the very beginning, that each visitor to the Island when he wrote in his travel diary what was typical of us, referred to them; so, for example, it has happened since the middle of the nineteenth century, when Don Nicolás Tanco visits us, in January 1853.

By the way, it was in that month and year when our National Hero José Martí was born; and we cannot ignore that in the first document of his that is conserved - the letter to his mother from Hanábana, being a child, in 1862 - he refers to his fine rooster: "The thing I tell him is a Fine Rooster that Don Lucas de Sotolongo has given me, it is very pretty and Dad takes good care of it, now Dad is looking for someone to cut the crest and fix it for me to fight it this year, and he says it is a rooster worth more than two ounces".

On that date, Tanco tells us, after narrating his first impressions, what Havana looked like, some generic customs, a visit to a certain family in the capital and another to an ingenuity, about the following public entertainments:

"Cock Fighting is another of the favorite diversions of the Cuban people; there is almost no village, no matter how small, where there is not a famous fence frequented by the best of society. Every year, in the towns that are called seasonal, that is, those where there are baths, and where wealthy families go to spend the summer heat, they form parties, bands, which give rise to a series of diversions. Each side names its queen, who is generally chosen among the most beautiful young women; every day there are cockfights in the afternoon, and then at night there is dancing. On the last day the best roosters are reserved, immense sums are betted, and the party that wins crowns its queen; it takes her out in triumph in the midst of the greatest clashes. At the moment the triumph is published in all the newspapers, and their columns are adorned with a multitude of decimas and poems dedicated to the winning queen. It is incredible the enthusiasm that takes hold of the young people in these functions; all take the thing so to heart, desire with such interest the triumph of their side, and are so jealous of their queen, as if they were political or religious parties in time of effervescence and passions. What Guelphs or Ghibellines fiercely! what Catholics or Protestants! what Reds or Conservatives had to hate each other! All the young people adopt a cockroach or motto according to the party to which they belong, and even the ties of being of the color adopted by the respective side. It is well known that when one reaches such a degree, displeasure and

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~~discomfort are very close. The most famous towns for this kind of~~
entertainment are Guanabacoa (says Guanavacon), El Cerro, Los Puentes, Güines, Guanajay, etc".

And Tanco is not the only one who leaves his testimony regarding a visit to a fence of roosters on the island, during that century, nor are the places indicated, the only "most famous" for this kind of entertainment.

In Pinar del Río, during those years, and especially during the development of its most traditional and popular festivities: "La Fiesta de los Bandos", the cockfights were one of the most notorious entertainments and there, in "the boys' alley" and more exactly in the back area of what would be Gustavo's palace and later Hotel Comercio, the red and blue bands met during such festivities, to develop, as Tanco tells here, the confrontation in honor of his Queen. This is what he told us in one of his Apuntes, later compiled and prologue by me and edited by José R Fraguera, Doctor Antonio R Delgado Villa. But, I limited myself to Tanco, among the visitors, because his description fits very much to what happened in our Fiestas de Los Bandos, in 1849, 1863 and 1880, when they are quoted or described by Tranquilino Sandalio de Noda, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and Felipita Estrada García.