

Alonso Coma, Ismael (2018). Historia de Guantánamo 1494-1898. Editorial El Mar y la Montaña

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The history of Guantánamo in the colonial stage has been approached by different authors from Guantanamo and from other parts of the country, in independent works dedicated to personalities, events, stages or processes. However, the work at hand, *Historia de Guantánamo 1494-1898*, written by the Guatemalan historian Ismael Alonso Coma, published by the Editorial el Mar y la Montaña in 2018, has the merit of summarizing a wide period spanning from 1494 to 1898, which facilitates the consultation and study of teachers, students and people interested in learning about the history of the region.

The author saw fit to present in a single volume three books that he had previously published: *History of Guantánamo. The road to the plantation 1494-1842* (2009), *History of Guantánamo. Rise of the plantation economy 1843-1868* (2010) and *History of Guantánamo 1868-1898*. (2012).

Alonso, (2018) when referring to his work points out: “The need to group them in the same book was imperative, first of all because of the eagerness of the population to know historical elements about our region; secondly, due to the emergence of other relevant information that should be included in a new edition [...] and the third reason, and not least, was that the number of printed copies was insufficient” (p.7)

The researcher Ismael Alonso is a graduate of the Universidad de Oriente where he studied for a BA in History and has dedicated more than 20 years of his life to scrutinizing the history of the Guantanamo region. In addition to the texts mentioned above, he has made other

publications, among them; the French books in Guantánamo (2014) and History of the American school in Guantánamo (2013), the latter in co-authorship with the researcher Magrid Barrio Batista. Some articles of his authorship were published in the Managüi magazine of the Historical Investigations Section of the Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba of the Guantánamo Province.

The results of his investigations have earned him important prizes: in 1985 Cerro Pelado as a historian of Guantanamo sports; obtained the Regino Boti Prize for History in 2008, for the book Historia de Guantánamo. The road to the plantation 1494-1842 and in 2010 it won the Cultural Journalism Award. He is a member of the Association of Pedagogues of Cuba.

The book consists of four sections; the first one comprises a broad theme dedicated to the conquest, colonization and self-consumption economy that covers the period between 1494 - 1803. In it the characteristics of the process of conquest and colonization in the region are exposed, the aboriginal resistance, the process of miscegenation and the introduction of some crops, such as rice, millet and beans that are part of the current diet of the people of Guantanamo. In the work the author reflects that the economy is for consumption although an intense smuggling of wood, meat and leather develops. The text highlights the frequent visits to our coasts by corsairs and pirates and the attempts of the colonial authorities to promote the economy of the region given its natural wealth, forests, fertile soils and the bay, highlights the commission of the count of Monpox and Jaruco.

The second section deals with the first half of the 19th century until 1842: the emergence and development of the plantation economy, characterized by the promotion of coffee and cotton production. The text reflects economic growth and its impact on the increase in population, forming the nucleus that will give way to the city of Guantánamo later. The author gives an intelligent treatment to the controversial issue of the origin of the city, elegantly handles different authors, data, references and other information that allow him to establish the year 1820 as the founding date of Guantánamo, an aspect in which there is still no consensus between local historians.

For his part, in the third section: the jurisdiction of Guantánamo, Alonso dedicates a wide space to the economic evolution of the region from 1843 to the eve of the Great War. He

argues with arguments the boom in the plantation economy, where the sugar industry and coffee production stand out. It also reflects slave labor and the role of immigration and its impact on the further development of the region. In his reflections, commercial activity and the emergence of the railway are also important.

In the fourth and last section, Guantánamo between 1868-1898, two stages are delimited: the first from 1868-1880, in which three conductive threads are defined; the Ten Years War, in all its dimensions and nuances in the Guantanamo region, economic evolution and the Chiquita War. In a second period from 1880-1898 the author returns to the economic-social evolution and the Necessary War, highlighting the role played by the inhabitants of the region in this contest. The personality of Pedro Agustín Pérez and the rise of La Confianza as well as the presence of the great war chiefs and the efforts made to preserve their lives play an important role.

In relation to the index, although the structure of the condensed books is generally respected, the way in which it is presented does not facilitate orientation as the hierarchy of the epigraphs is not met, except in section two, which addresses the emergence and development of the plantation economy. (1803-1842).

The iconography is poor, it only has three plans and a sketch, which illustrate the evolution and growth of the Villa de Santa Catalina de Guantánamo. In the plan corresponding to the year 1883, the layout of the streets of the city that is preserved to this day is observed

Considering the importance of the investigated stage for the conformation of the knowledge system of the history of the locality, it is remarkable the presence of elements of the regional culture, in which the origins of manifestations that remain today are identified as the music, dance, carnivals, some of them become traditions.

Teachers from the different teaching subsystems can find in the text the necessary information to face the contents that demand the implementation of the history of the locality in relation to national history and thus make the teaching of the history of Cuba, in order to awaken feelings of admiration and respect for the inhabitants of the region, who with their actions in each historical period contributed to the growth of the town and the nation.

The work is very useful for students who receive the Cuban history course at different levels of education. On their pages they can expand the information provided by teachers and prepare their seminars and independent works. Care must be taken in the selection of the epigraphs to be used with primary school students, since sometimes the work is dense and contradicts the views of authors better known by schoolchildren. In the same way, it is possible to document with the text to enrich the information available to spread the ephemeris of the region.

At a time when Neoliberal Globalization sets out to make nations disappear, knowledge of the history of the locality becomes an effective weapon to confront this purpose by revealing to students and the general population the cultural wealth of the regions, whose heritage must be preserved. So, this book is an invaluable ally in pursuit of knowing the history of the Guantanamo region to be in better conditions to work to make it grow and develop with sustainability.