

I was visiting my friend Amaury Pérez's house when I discovered the treasure. On the terrace table, where he and his wife Petí usually sit to read and enthuse friends with the most sought-after literary or musical novelties, a book of encyclopedic dimensions rested, with a marker on the first pages: "New Universal History ", Volume I, Ancient and medieval history.

And this? I asked. "The wonder", they responded in duet, while I tried to review the almost 500 pages of texts and images in the book that I would have liked to have in my student years. There was everything, or almost everything, what I had to search many times, dozens of texts and authors through, in the days of nerves and anxieties that preceded the exams, when, what do I say, the internet, we didn't even have word processors.

The first thing that amazed me was the synthesis, not the simplification (not at all), of fundamental events in history, in boxes, graphics, color photographs. Then, periodization, which is not fixed on certain specific events but on the rise and fall of the relations of production. And even more, the narrative that places the original cultures of all continents on the same level and treats with equal respect. Our American pyramids are no less transcendent than the Egyptian ones, nor are the Eastern cults and gods less sacred than those of the West.

I embraced that first book like a child to someone else's toy, but I never got to borrow it. A resounding no from its owners

froze my words. "There are five volumes and they only come from here as an inheritance," said Amaury.

Later I learned that they were a gift from Dr. Eduardo Torres Cuevas and that they had had a beautiful presentation in the Aula Magna of the University of Havana on April 21, the day I turned 62 and for several hours I gave myself a news fast, which is why I must have missed the editorial event of the year. But looking for the details in the journalistic notes, archived by the grace of the internet, I hardly knew more.

So I went to interview the Director of the Martiano Program and of the House of High Studies Don Fernando Ortiz, parent of the Contemporary Image publishing house to which we owe the impressive edition of the New Universal History, entirely made in Cuba by great Cuban authors and that, by Torres Cuevas I would know, is a work dreamed of and requested by Fidel Castro. A part of his transcendental legacy for Cuban youth.

—Q: How daring is this, Dr., to make a universal history in Cuba?

First of all, I must say that the Casa de Altos Estudios is a university institution dedicated to research, promotion and dissemination of the work, not only historical, but also cultural, of the country.

We have done some works that I, really, thank our editorial team, for their commitment, for their modesty and above all for the quality with which they worked, editors, designers, etc.

The process has a research phase and a third-level teaching phase and from the beginning we saw the need for everything to have coherence in its publications. This could not be enclosed within the walls of the House or the University, it had to have a wide audience. That gave rise to the Contemporary Image publishing house.

The second is that the House will never see or have seen itself as a closed center. We invite researchers from other centers, from other departments, to cooperate with us in projects, many of which are carried out by researchers who are not from the House but have worked towards the objectives that we have set for ourselves.

And I would say that the House has had in recent years, two works that I consider that, due to their magnitude and the quality of their

editions, have come to satisfy us deeply.

One is the History of the Constitutions, in three volumes, which was made in the heat of the elaboration of our Constitution. That led us to the reconstruction of all those that ruled Cuba, from the Spanish one in 1812, which is called La Pepa, to the current Constitution. There we worked with great care in the introductory essays, which were made by Dr. Reinaldo Suárez Suárez, from Santiago de Cuba and myself.

But we must speak here of the work of the editor, Luis M de las Traviesas, a long-time companion with historians, and of the designer Luis Gutiérrez. There a creative debate takes place. The covers are not casual, it is not what the designer came up with. It is a team effort, which analyzes the content that the cover has to reflect. The cover itself is part of the content of the book.

About 20 years ago, the Commander asked us, speaking with us, two things, with one of which I consider that we are still indebted, but he was then very interested in the subjects of History. In the country there was interest in acquiring Universal Histories, encyclopedias, etc. And he launched the challenge: weren't we capable of doing that ourselves?

The colleagues from the University History Department said yes and so did we. It was about doing a work like never before in two senses: it would be the first time that Universal History would be made, covering from the most remote times to the present day. That work required specialists by area, that is, as can be seen in the credits, there are seven specialists involved (see footnote) and I want to pay tribute to all of them, because the one who has been working on his subject the least time has been 40 years.

This is not someone who did it. For years they have been polishing, developing, in teaching, the contents that had to be synthesized in these books.

On the other hand, there was another very important challenge: many say that history books are not attractive, that boys do not read them.

The challenge was to break that pattern, to make a book that would be more attractive to young people than to ourselves, and we succeeded. Many of those who already have them call me and tell me that their children have taken a volume from them. We have accomplished something extraordinary: the boys want to read the book!

And they begin to fall in love with reading that book, at a time when

people read more online and digitally. But it is not easy to read a long book on the phone, even on an ebook ... When it is a short text, yes, but it was not the case. It is therefore a profusely illustrated book. Maps, sometimes you tell the boy Damascus and he doesn't know where Damascus is. You had to make attractive maps and maps. And boxes to highlight key events in short texts.

Both the group that wrote the texts and the group that had to do the editing, we agreed that the books had to be very visual. Let the images catch and reach young people with that force. And the light texts. Not simplistic, on the contrary, but they could reach a more general public, because they do not have academic language, which is already known that when we get entangled in it, there are many people who may not understand because it is scientific language.

Initially, we thought about doing it in four volumes, until we reached World War II, because afterwards the Cold War came, which had a result that we already know and that end of the socialist camp creates another era. But after thinking about it a lot, it was decided to do the fifth part, from 1946 to 2008.

The other challenge is that Universal History was with the vision from the Third World. That, for us, was the key to a Universal History made in Cuba. It was not repeating the way Universal History is structured from day one, because there and that can be seen in the latest serials and films, the apology for monarchies, for a lavishness, which is never explained where it comes from.

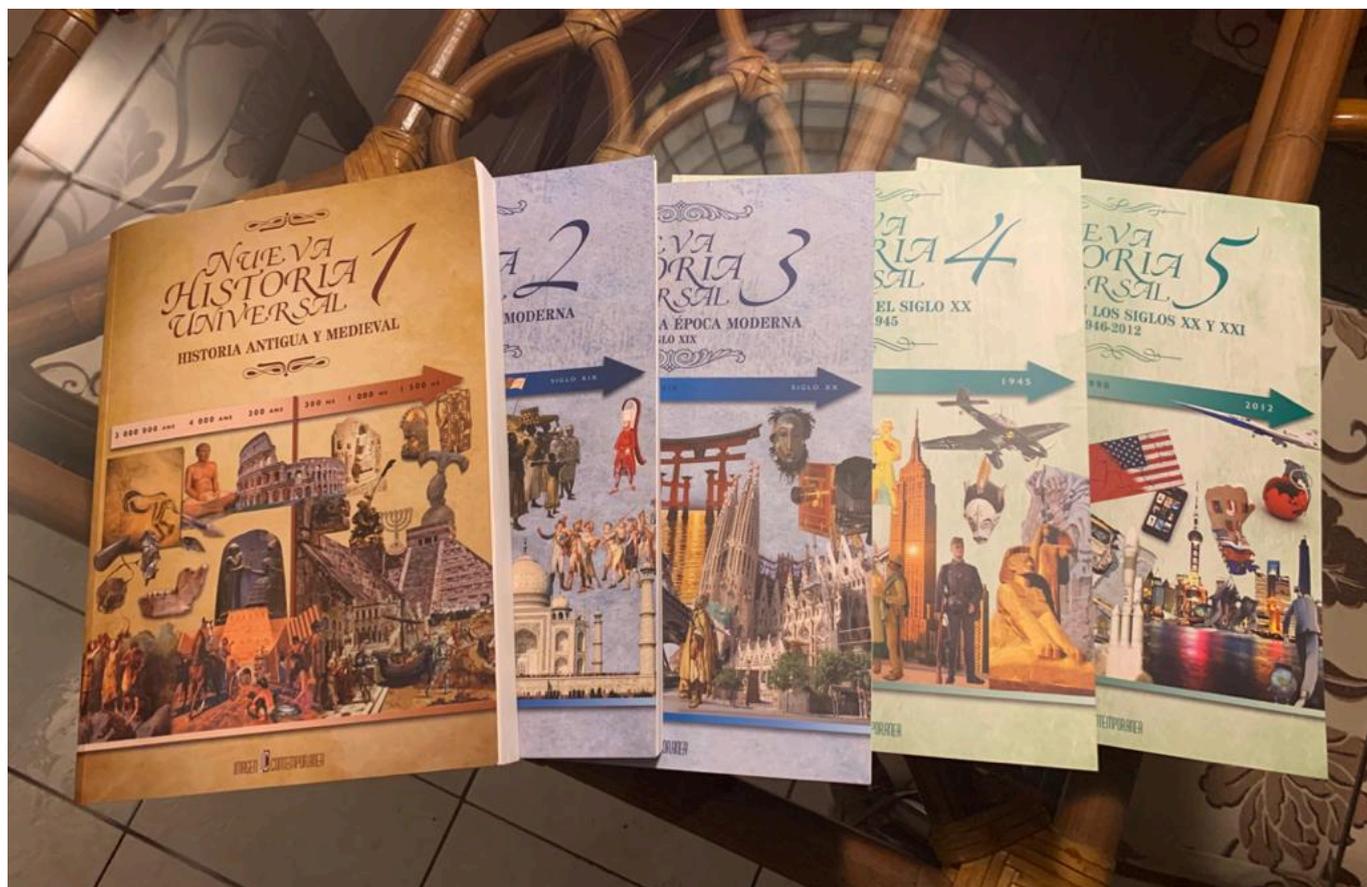
he Third World is the one that has to speak and tell its story in order to understand what is happening right now: from how you emptied Honduras and why the current migrations, for example. That understanding of the world was what we had to give: the world seen from the Third World.

I've always been a Gramscian about those things. Gramsci said in one of his letters "the only predictable thing is the fight." The scene changes, the circumstances change, the world has always had moments of heyday of facistoid currents that have their explanation. The secret is not to give up, although the cost, for those of us who take on this challenge, is very high.

We are in a struggle that others do not want to fight.

As I tell my colleagues: at the beginning I was fighting for the triumph of good. Now I fight because evil does not triumph, so that one day good may triumph.

A book of culture



Q: This is an extraordinary editorial event, although you hardly hear about it.

That book is barely a month and a half here. It is a very expensive book, with triple layer matte paper, so that the images can stand out. And the letters to a score that favors reading. To be read with pleasure. As Martí said “reading is growing, but it is also pleasure”. And you have to make it a pleasure. And besides, you are cultivating your own culture.

Sometimes we talk about Culture, but, with a lack of knowledge of Universal History, what Culture are we talking about? With loose elements, without any connection, how do you build a real culture?

We can talk about Silvio, but also about Mozart, Matamoros, but also Shostakovich, they are not antagonistic, they complement a universe.

But that must be cultivated, it does not come about spontaneously. You are cultivating a musical or literary taste as you go into it. There is a lot to bring to the people. And I think that this universal history contributes a lot to that cultural base that, if we sow it from the earliest youth, you can have an enlightened youth. I believe in this to such an extent that I tell you that this book is not a history book. It is a book of Culture. How the alphabet arises, the different ways of making constructions, tastes, both in dress and in other rules. That people do not see history as action clearly but as the becoming of politics as a result of culture.

-Q: This World History can only be read in the traditional format?

We have opted for all media. The paper book will be difficult to disappear, but it seems that it will become even more expensive (it is already expensive) and will decrease significantly. Not everyone will be able to access its limited print edition.

So we met with the directors of Cinesoft, Mundo Latino, GeoCuba, to reproduce it on all media, which can be seen in all possible formats.

We are going to expand the book on things that we can expand, but the multimedia will support all types of search. We must be at the level of the moment we live, of Science and technology, as far as we can go. Each format has advantages and disadvantages. We will take advantage of all the advantages.

Immediately there is edition in PDF, in ebook and in multimedia.

-Q: How can a family acquire these books or will it be only for libraries for now? The immediate: these books will be in all the country's high schools, in the main libraries, at least in the 30 most important ones, in the entire Culture system, the Art schools and the Universities will also have it.

It is a book not only for those who study History. An engineer needs to know that culture. Another part of the books will be made available to the public. And maybe you have to think about a second edition.

You already have a demand that exceeds what we imagine. In El Salvador it has great interest in acquiring it. And we could edit it in other countries, but I want them all to be careful editions like this one, for the value that the set brings.

I told you about the book of the Constitutions and about this one. To

do them was to comply with Fidel, we had that commitment. In this, we must highlight all the support we have received from the country's authorities, particularly from President Díaz-Canel, who to a certain extent is the continuity of Fidel's interest.

The next step that we are going to take has to do with the fact that we conceive that Universal History together with the History of Cuba. Now there will be an edition probably in three volumes that we are not going to call *Historia de Cuba*, because the term somewhat restricts the idea of what we want and on the other hand because it has been used a lot for different things.

That book is going to be called *Memories of the Cuban nation*. It will have the same structure, the same characteristics, but you'll see. It will also be a pleasant story, looking for the charm to tell. You have memory because you are alive, the present history is part of your history, you must live the present with memory.

Lack of memory is a misfortune that has led to certain disasters in Latin America. Many young people today do not know our history. Some know a wrong version and others imagine it as it occurs to them. This will be the memory of the nation. Your memory And it is ready. It is already going to press.

Note: The seven authors of the work are: Dr.C Lillián Moreira de Lima, Professor of Universal History, Dr.C Constantino Torres Fumero, Professor of General Historiography, DrC Evelio Díaz Lezcano, Professor of Contemporary History, DrC Sergio Guerra Vilaboy, Professor of History of America, DrC Reinaldo Sánchez Porro, Professor of History of Africa and the Middle East, Mta. María del C. Maseda Urra, Assistant Professor of History of Africa and Dr.C María Teresa Montes de Oca, Professor of History of Asia.

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