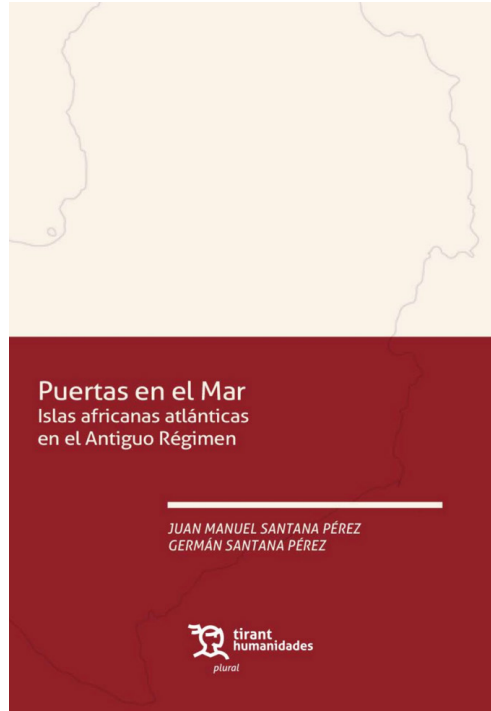




## Reseña



Juan Manuel Santana Pérez y Germán Santana Pérez (2022). *Puertas en el Mar. Islas africanas atlánticas en el Antiguo Régimen*. Valencia, Tirant lo Blanch.

In recent decades interest in islands as places of isolation and preservation has gradually given way to a growing focus on their representation as sites of fluidity and interconnectedness. Traditional dichotomous approaches have thus become the subject of a constant process of renegotiation, of which the attraction exerted by island scenarios on contemporary literature can be seen as illustrative.

It is precisely in this context that the *Puertas en el mar* stems from the authors' need to carry out comparative and interdisciplinary studies on the history of Middle Atlantic islands that fit into the global dynamic. They emphasize how the real importance and not just strategic of the archipelagos of the Middle Atlantic (*Macaronesia*, São Tomé and Príncipe) has often been neglected by scholars of the modern age, who have mainly focused in recent decades only on the second aspect, analyzing the various connections that were established between these islands and the three continents: Europe, Africa, and America.

The authors' goal is to demonstrate the economic, social, and historical importance of the islands and how this importance was later reflected in the economic and non-economic development of the three continents mentioned earlier. They have chosen to

treat the archipelagos of Madeira, the Canaries and Cape Verde and the islands of São Tomé and Príncipe (bordering the African coast) as territories with their specific history and tradition, preferring the internal point of view due to the large amount of historical sources that these islands still preserve today. The archives consulted by the authors (25 archives in 7 different countries) demonstrate the extent to which the sources determined the structure of the book, which consists of three introductory chapters, 12 chapters dealing with different aspects of the archipelagos that reflect the variety of sources consulted, such as agriculture, fishing, trade, administration, and defense, until analysis on the island imaginary.

Just the insular imaginary (Chapter 12), demonstrates how belonging to an island incorporates moral, cultural, psychological and legendary aspects of those who find themselves living in the context of a space bounded by the sea. Just the legendary aspect, one finds in the story of the island of San Borondón. Legend has it that this island appears and disappears near El Hierro. Medieval cartographers listed it as the eighth island in the Canary Islands archipelago. The engineer Leonardo Torriani drew a detailed map of the island, even speculating its distance from the other islands (Santana y Santana, 2002: 306). Such an island was thought to be a lost paradise. Such phenomenon is reminiscent of the Ferdinanda island located in the Sicilian Channel, along the coast of Sciacca and long disputed by the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and the United Kingdom.

Chapter 10 (“Sociedad”) deals with the issue of slavery; the authors dwell on how different the component of enslaved people from Africa was in the different archipelagos. Madeira and the Canaries were composed as societies of free people in which there were also enslaved people, while Cape Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe were born as true slave societies; precisely the first in the Atlantic world both to establish slavery and to abandon it for internal reasons before the abolition process in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Most of the enslaved people were employed in sugar crops, with the remainder in craft and domestic work.

The analysis on the history of slavery in the Canary Islands is interesting, showing how in the slow attempt to conquer the archipelago, which occurred at different times, the natives of the islands experienced slavery until, having completed the process of conquest it was forbidden that the subjects of the Catholic Kings, were subjected to slavery. In Madeira as in the Canary Islands, some of the people enslaved were Muslims from North Africa; still others came from sub-Saharan Africa (Guinea Coast and Angola). Differences related to geographical origin were reflected in language and especially in culture and traditions. All enslaved people indiscriminately were entitled to the same kind of treatment. They were forcibly converted to the religion of the Monarchy and their name was changed to one that conformed to Christian doctrine (Santana y Santana, 2002: 239-241).

Owning a person enslaved meant in most cases placing a branding mark of the “master’s” initial on the skin, in distinct parts of the body such as the arm, chest and even the face. In addition to these expressions of violence, there were various types of torture, such as being whipped an indefinite number of times.

The issue of the administration of the territories and the danger of pirate raids is addressed in the eleventh chapter. Among the first instruments of control that the Monarchy established in the Canary Islands soon after the conquest, the authors mention the tribunal of the Holy Office in 1505. This was followed by the establishment of the *Real Audiencia* (1526). Both institutions were the first to be established in the ultramarine dominions. The *Audiencia* was not only an organ of justice (civil and criminal) of the Monarchy, but it also had administrative and economic management. As an organ of justice, its jurisdiction also extended to appeals against rulings issued on island domains, with reference to the realengo islands (Gran Canaria, La Palma and Tenerife) and the *señorío* islands (Lanzarote, Fuerteventura, El Hierro and la Gomera) (Santana y Santana, 2002: 253-255).

As for pirate raids, Francis Drake's attempts to seize the islands of La Palma and Gomera first (1585) and the city of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria ten years later together with Jhon Hawkins were famous. In the 17th century, however, the hardest attack was by Robert Blake at Santa Cruz de Tenerife in 1657 in search of gold from the Nueva España fleet that had taken refuge in that very port. As for the other archipelagos, the city of São Tomé was attacked by the French in 1567 and suffered a devastating attack in 1599 by the Dutch Van der Does. The city was later conquered by the Dutch West India Company between 1641 and 1648 and then returned under Portuguese rule (Santana y Santana, 2002: 270).

The state of the art concerning the Atlantic islands is well explained in the third chapter. The authors point out how the studies conducted so far have failed to capture the natural insularity that unites and at the same time distinguishes all the archipelagos analyzed. Their position stands as a clear criticism of those studies that have treated islands from an exclusively single perspective, dividing them by archipelago. Studies that have instead attempted to encompass the Atlantic archipelagos have done so through a distinctly Eurocentric view (Santana y Santana, 2002: 29-39).

The common features of these archipelagos that make possible one viewed from the “inside” and unified are addressed in the fourth chapter. The first two common features are the geography of the territories and certainly their history.

## Reference

Santana Pérez, J.M. and Santana Pérez, G. (2022). *Puertas en el Mar. Islas africanas atlánticas en el Antiguo Régimen*. Valencia, Tirant lo Blanch.

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