

A Forgotten Atlas of Erwin Raisz: “Atlas de Cuba”

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Extended Abstract

The “Atlas de Cuba” was published in 1949 by the Institute of Geographical Exploration at Harvard University. This atlas is result of collaboration between Erwin Raisz (1893–1968), the American cartographer born in the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and a Cuban geographer and cartographer, Gerardo Canet (1911–2011), who spent a grant obtained from the Guggenheim Foundation to work as assistant professor under the tutelage of Erwin Raisz in the Department of Cartography of the Institute of Geographic Explorations at Harvard University between 1945 and 1949.

Using Canet’s words in the Introduction, the atlas is “*a living picture of Cuban Geography as far as possible in 64 pages*”. A total of 34 themes were represented by maps and graphics:

- Introduction: Cuba, center of the Americas; The world around Cuba
- History of the country: Discovery, conquest and colonization; Colonial Cuba; Revolutionary Cuba
- Physical geographical characteristics: Climate; Hurricanes; Magnetism, gravity and earthquakes; Oceanography; Geology; Geomorphology; Soils; Forestry; Fisheries; Vegetation
- Major parameters to describe the society: Population; Standard of living; Health; Social composition; Government; Tourist trade; Education
- National economy: Agriculture; Sugar; Minerals; Tobacco; Coffee; Winter vegetables; Fruits; Other crops; Livestock; Industries; Communications; Import and Export

The atlas is the rich combination of maps with pictures, charts and short explanatory texts written in Spanish and English. The authors not only

wanted to create an atlas for scientists and specialists with the different topics represented in the maps: their intention was to make all this information available and easily understandable for the public in general (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Examples of flow map (Canet & Raisz 1949: 49) and dot map completed with the isotypes of Neurath (Canet & Raisz 1949: 54)

The atlas joined two peculiar cartographic styles: the delicacy of the drawing ability of Erwin Raisz and Canet's interest to represent the broader spectrum of data collected by him with the collaboration of Cuban scientific personalities and governmental institutions, using all the graphic tools at their disposal to make the atlas more attractive.

Considering that the Academies of Sciences of then Soviet Union and of Cuba (founded in 1962) published the National Atlas of Cuba only in 1969, it is undeniable that the atlas of Canet and Raisz was worthy of being recognized as a meritorious work of the Cuban cartography in the period 1949–1969. It was the only atlas summarizing the most characteristic aspects of the country with a degree of detail and scientific rigor according to the level of the Cuban scientific development at that time.

Since 1961 this place was and even today, 15 years after having begun the 21st century, is denied by Cuban scientific and politic authorities with the deliberate official ignorance of its existence, causing that it is an unknown work for the new generations of Cubans.

Paradoxically the international valuation of the atlas has grown over the years. Currently, it constitutes an extremely valuable and rare piece of universal cartography, because of the participation of Erwin Raisz in its creation and the small number of copies that have stood the test of time.

References

Canet G and Raisz E (1949) *Atlas de Cuba*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts