

REVIEW

Eduardo VILLALÓN ROJAS, Consuelo LEÓN WÖPPKE y Mauricio JARA FERNÁNDEZ. **Jalonando Chile Austral Antártico. El Ejército en la Antártica, 1948.** Santiago. The Printing Office of the Military Geographical Institute. 2010. 377 pp.

I must confess that my academic area of specialization is not history but rather literature. Nevertheless, from the beginning of both disciplines they have been indissolubly linked, given that History has many times been the source of inspiration for those literary works which take history as its source, while the techniques that are characteristic of literary discourse have been used by Historians to narrate of the facts of Historyⁱ. The relationship between History and Literature was first detected and differentiated by Aristotle in his *Arte Poetica*, when he stated that “it is not the job of the poet to relate events as to how they happened, but rather as they should have or could have happened probably or necessarily; because the historian and the poet are not different despite the fact that one speaks in verse and the other in prose (for one could put into verse the matters referred to by Herodotus and it would not be any less true whether in verse or not); rather the difference is that one tells things exactly as they happened, and the other as it was natural for them to have happened”ⁱⁱ.

This book by Villalón, León and Jara falls undoubtedly within the area of historical discourse, as the material narrated within it forms part of the history of Chile, and, in its turn, is centred within a specific framework, that of the national history of the Antarctic. The account, therefore, falls within the discursive parameters of historiography which is, in this case, historical-documental, as we could also speak of a literary historiography. In consequence, what the authors have done is “*give an account of the events exactly as they happened*” –as the philosopher would say-, in this specific referent contextualised from the beginning by the title of the work. The three authors have narrated the events – marking, according to them-, that is, marking stages, episodes, in a determined evolutionary process that culminates in the presence of the Chilean Army in the southern territories and the Antarctic. This is also a complement to the main title. The verb *jalonar* which means to mark used as a gerund in the title of the book is well chosen, given that this impersonal verbal form indicates the simultaneity of the action with the time of which they speak, or in this case, that of which they write and describe, the history is related and described, that is a full coincidence between the linguistic statements and enunciations.

The book begins with a substantial introduction in which Villalón, León and Jara explain the objectives of their investigation, as well as the other historiographical objectives that they had in mind when they began the process of marking the history of the Antarctic. In regards to the objective of the book, the authors indicate that primarily their intention was to establish the behaviour of the Chileans as regards the fact of the Antarctic, and to later make clear the presence there of the armed forces, specifically the Chilean Army in that territory., in order to do this, they set themselves various questions

which are answered within the text, such as: “a) In what way and from what time has the Chilean Army been linked with the southern regions and the Antarctic?; b) From what period has this institution considered it as a priority that its established functions as the protector of national sovereignty should be linked to the realization of scientific activities in the Antarctic?; c) In what measure was the concept of “sovereignty through science” shared by the government and other power groups?; d) in way did Chile have to adapt itself to the changing exigencies of the other Antarctic powers and how did this affect the Army?”

The authors state that in the analysis of the history of the Antarctic, as well as the significant importance of the “O’Higgins Base” in this territory has been done on the basis of the view of the world in which the events developed (“as they were”, as the historiographers said). Therefore, the detailed documentary search in different archives has enabled the authors to trace, devise and weave the plot of a history which goes back to the XVI Century with “the spatial delimitation which was carried out at Tordesillas, between the kingdoms of Spain and Portugal”, and which ends for the effect of this investigation with the creation and the inauguration of the “O’Higgins Base” in 1948. Between both historical events, Villalón, León and Jara, display different moments – steps- in the history of the Chilean Antarctic. In order to do this, they have divided their work into two sections entitled: *The Basis for the Chilean Antarctic Patrimony*”, the first; and *“Consolidating Chilean sovereignty: the Chilean Army in the Antarctic”*, the second.

The first part was in turn, divided by the authors into historiographic chapters with the aim of analyzing the formation and evolution of the basis of the Chilean Antarctic patrimony from the colonial period to the start of the Second World War. This can be read with pleasure, despite the profusion of dates and notes that are characteristic of a work of this nature but which do not impede its enjoyment by the non-specialised lay person of the matter under investigation. The second part is fundamentally centred on the events which led to the consolidation of Chilean sovereignty at the *finis terrae* and the presence of the Chilean Army in the white continent. The authors analyze this establishment in the frame of the Second World War and its materialization in the period of the early post war period, as well as also referring to the permanent installation of the Army through the previous mentioned Antarctic base and the achievements of those who carried out this process. Just like the history of its antecedents, this can be read with great interest and fluidity, because the names of important Chilean figures that played key roles in the development of the history and which form part already of the imaginary national and international Antarctic appear.

The interpretation made of the historical events by Villalón, León and Jara is diligent, detailed, documented and attractive; this interpretation manages to transmit a certain degree of emotion at various moments of the narration of this historical event which permits them definitely to conclude with fundamental asseverations about the development of the events. Therefore, by example, as regards the first of the problems posed, the authors affirm that the Chilean Army has been linked to the southern and

Antarctic territories since Bernardo O'Higgins stated that they were categorical national imperative and the army made it their own; also important milestones were the Generals Bulnes and Cañas Montalva in that consolidation. Also, interestingly they establish the relationship between geopolitical sovereignty and Antarctic scientific investigation as a permanent imperative and which is totally demonstrated throughout the text. On the other hand, the authors emphasize the fact that despite their not being a fully developed scientific consciousness in the country, the government, from the first expedition onwards, the government of President González Videla established that objective incorporating important scientists in it. Finally, they maintain that –responding to the question- :”the O'Higgins Base did not need to adapt itself, as it had been founded with that scientific imperative, and it would be the Army that making their own the words and concepts of the Commander in Chief, faced with true devotion and resolve this difficult and complex task in such a short time”. The authors –and, additionally, that can be understood from reading the text-, emphasize the role that General Cañas Montalva and his geopolitical vision played in the transformation of the mental images of the governing class about Chile, and which, in consequence, made possible the permanence and consolidation of the Chilean Antarctic policy.

From the material point of view, the work in question is one of careful edition and preparation with a number of images that illustrate and enrich the contents. A complete bibliography –where articles and studies of the authors are included- as well as an annexes and a complete name index complement the work.

To sum up, *Jalonando Chile Austral Antártico. El Ejército en la Antártica, 1948*, of Eduardo Villalón R., Consuelo León W. and Mauricio Jara F., is a work that not only enhances their prestige as academics who are experts in Antarctic studies, but who also emphasize the presence of our country in the southern territories. Definitely, it is an essential work of investigation, which should be read by all those who feel *the melancholy of the ice*.

Eddie Morales Piña
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ⁱ The reader who is interested in the concepts of historical discourse/literary discourse, history/ literature, should consult among others Lozano, J.: *El discurso histórico* (Madrid: Alianza, 1987); White, Hayden: *El Contenido de la forma. Narrativa, discurso y representación histórica* (Barcelona: Paidós, 1992); also White, H: *Metahistoria* (Mexico: F.C.E., 1992); Ricoeur, Paul: *Tiempo y narración* (México: Siglo XXI editores, 1995, V. 1: Configuración del tiempo en el relato histórico; V. II: Con figuración del tiempo en el relato de ficción; V. III: El tiempo narrado).

ⁱⁱ Cfr. Aristóteles: *Arte poética*. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe. 1970 (p. 45)

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