

The Festival of the Bandos

Category: Legends and traditions

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It is true that our city, Pinar del Río, has maintained the Popular Festivals for years; but, it is also an unquestionable truth that these only acquire a connotation of celebration and amusement, of relaxing and of a type of "recess" in the work of a year of constant battling. And I do not criticize that it is effective or not for the population, that by the way is less and less divided in its opinions on the Feasts of the City, because the group that impugns them becomes bigger.

What I point out is the little enriching of these festivities that in their best moments only turn out to be an easy imitation of the santiaguera conga - at a great distance from them - that does not even remember our San Rosendo Fair, on the 40s of the last century, when the Committee Everything for Pinar del Río rescued the Verbenas that preceded it since 1903; and much less they remember our Festivities of the Bandos, in XIX century.

The Fiesta de los Bandos was undoubtedly the most deeply rooted and cultural value treasured for several years. Its origin is lost in the mist of the first decades of the nineteenth century, only illuminated by the texts of Tranquilino Sandalio de Noda, or Villaverde or his contemporary, no less famous, José Victoriano Betancourt, in their prints and traditions.

The matancero Félix Manuel Tanco also leaves us an interesting chronicle of the cockfights that took place during the Bandos Festival in 1848. And the camagüeyana Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, at the end of September 1863, according to oral tradition, during her homage at the Liceo Lírico Musical Pinar del Río, shortly after the one she received at the Teatro Tacón in Havana; she became interested in the local festivities and commented that they seemed a little warlike to her, not only attending to the warrior saint who ruled the festivities as patron saint, but also in games and strolls, she faced Creole and Spanish people, which was not to her liking.

Four years later, Amado Oscar de Céspedes, son of the Father of the Fatherland and who contributed to such an epithet after having been imprisoned after leaving this jurisdiction, would see in the Pinar del Río theatrical milieu, in which he inserted himself accompanying the Festival of the Bandos in 1867, that confrontation; just as the Pinar del Río people who suffered the prohibition of the Festival, by the Spanish authorities since that year, due to the revolutionary situation that led to the struggle for independence in these Western lands.

Only ten years later, in 1877, when there were still parties of uprisings in Pinar del Río surroundings, (as an evident sample that

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the Great War had not been suffocated completely in our zone), such festivities re-emerged, first associated to the Patron Saint San Rosendo, on the first of March, but then they were moved as culmination of the Major Week or Holy Week and instead of one day they were extended to three, in the month of April.

And of course when they were resumed, the representative of the Spanish colony in Pinar del Río, the Bando Rojo, above all from that Fiesta in 1878, year of the Pacto del Zanjón, would not only be Red although it continued to be called that way, it would be red and gualda in its costumes on the day of the Fiesta, to show the colors of the Spanish flag that had defeated the Mambises. And the Bando Azul, so called, would also wear white in their clothes and the blue badge or some ornament, showing the colors of the flag of the lone star.

Darkened by the impact of the seismic movements that shook Pinar del Río in 1878, 1879 and 1880, the festivities did not have the brightness that in 1881 would reach, as we know in the memories of Enrique Prieto Candás, major of Pinar del Río at that time, or in the brilliant text that exceeds the characteristics of a simple chronicle and for that reason its author the poet Felipa Estrada García, inserts it as a chapter of a novel of his that is published in Europe; and also publishes it in an independent brochure.

From both texts I have nourished myself, among others, with the objective of typifying in one what in several Fiestas de los Bandos happened; and of this way to facilitate to the direction of culture in the territory a document that allows to develop the project of rescue of such Fiestas, as genuine manifestation of our immaterial patrimony.

Written by Gerardo Ortega in his site Estampas de la Vueltabajo.