

Colonization and agricultural development in the Galapagos Islands, 1832-1924: New contributions to the human history of the archipelago

Colonización y desarrollo agropecuario en las Islas Galápagos, 1832-1924: Nuevos aportes a la historia humana del archipiélago



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Abstract

The Galapagos Islands are one of the most important spots for tourism and science worldwide because the academy considers them a real evolution laboratory. Besides, the islands have been part of Ecuador for almost two hundred years. During that time, the country, mainly in the first hundred, did not have control or a sovereign presence that would allow it to establish a clear colonization policy. This paper tries to give new data about two important activities that occurred and continue to occur nowadays: colonization and agricultural development between 1900 and 1924. For this paper, secondary sources were reviewed by Ecuadorian and foreign authors who studied these two topics. However, the paper adds essential information from primary sources that the cited authors had not previously considered; among these, we can mention press from Guayaquil city in the period mentioned above, like El Telégrafo or El Guante. Besides, information from the Port Authority, Mines Register, Presidential Office, Parliament, and some ministries are included. Among the main results obtained, the paper shows information about national and international companies that settled on the islands, a detailed report about the death of Manuel Cobos and Leonardo Reina in San Cristobal Island, and the acquisition of copper mines in Galapagos by Ecuadorian investors.

Keywords: Galapagos Islands, colonization, agriculture, industries, mining.

Resumen

Las islas Galápagos son uno de los sitios más importantes para el turismo y la ciencia a nivel global, al ser consideradas, en el ámbito científico, como un verdadero laboratorio de la evolución. Asimismo, las islas han sido parte del territorio ecuatoriano por casi doscientos años, en los cuales el país, principalmente en los primeros cien, no tuvo ni control ni una presencia soberana que le permitiera establecer una clara política de colonización. Este artículo busca entregar nuevos datos sobre dos actividades importantes que se dieron y se siguen dando hasta la actualidad: la colonización y el desarrollo agropecuario en el periodo comprendido entre 1900 y 1924. Para esto, se revisaron fuentes secundarias, tanto de

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autores ecuatorianos como extranjeros, que han estudiado estos dos temas. Sin embargo, el artículo suma información importante de fuentes primarias que no habían sido consideradas previamente por los autores citados, entre estas podemos mencionar varias publicaciones de la ciudad de Guayaquil en el periodo mencionado, principalmente *El Telégrafo*, *El Guante* y *El Día*. Además, se incluye información obtenida en lo que hoy se conoce como Autoridad Portuaria, Registro de Minas, Presidencia de la República, Congreso Nacional y diferentes ministerios de la época. Entre los principales resultados que se han obtenido consta información sobre empresas extranjeras y nacionales que se asentaron en las islas, un detallado informe sobre las muertes de Manuel Cobos y Leonardo Reina, en la isla San Cristóbal, y la adquisición de minas de cobre en el archipiélago por parte de personas naturales.

Palabras clave: Islas Galápagos, colonización, agricultura, industrias, minería.

1. Introduction

The Galapagos Islands are, without a doubt, one of the most important archipelagos in the world. While its biodiversity may not be as abundant as that of the South American Amazon, it boasts a significant level of endemism, which has drawn scientific attention to these islands since Charles Darwin's arrival in the 19th century. It has also made the Galapagos a coveted travel destination for millions of people. However, the Galapagos is not only about science and tourism. Since 1830, when Ecuador officially claimed the islands, a significant number of Ecuadorians have settled there and are known today as colonists.

This colonization by Ecuadorians was both intermittent and progressive. It is worth noting, however, that at the time of the official annexation under the government of Flores, no Ecuadorian settlers were living on the islands. The possession act, signed on Floreana Island, mentions a foreigner named Juan Jenssen or Johnson, who reportedly had been living on the island for several years (Latorre, 2011). With this annexation, Ecuador added miles to its vast territory during the first half of the 19th century. However, it is known that Flores was not merely interested in expanding Ecuadorian territory on the maps of the time—maps that, incidentally, referred to the islands as the King Charles Islands. Flores also sought to immortalize himself by initially naming them Las Florianas, a name that never gained traction.

Thus, the Ecuadorian government took on the mission of populating and colonizing these islands, located about 1,000 km from what is known as mainland Ecuador—a challenging distance to traverse at the time. The first settlers arrived as part of an official program initiated by Flores' government, led by the principal figure behind the annexation of the islands, José de Villamil, and executed by Colonel Ignacio Hernández. The plan aimed not only to secure possession of the islands but also to consolidate jurisdiction and reinforce Ecuadorian sovereignty in this remote territory (Deler, 2007).

Although Flores' government had not yet clearly defined what to do with the Galapagos Islands at the time of their annexation, General Villamil already had various plans related to agricultural and livestock production on the islands. Shortly thereafter, the decision to use the islands as a penal colony would disrupt many of the private projects being carried out there.

2. Methodology

The Galapagos Islands have been the subject of countless publications of all kinds, analyzing a wide array of topics. However, many of these studies have been incomplete, addressing themes such as nature, evolution, biodiversity, colonization, environmental impact, policies, scientific advancements, the islands' natural history, and endemism, among others. One of these themes has been colonization and its impact—both past and present—on the islands' various ecosystems, particularly regarding agriculture and livestock.

Historical and colonization-related studies of the archipelago are often scattered across various historical publications. While these works cover broad time periods, the information they include tends to be very ge-

neral¹. The objective of this study is to analyze the processes of colonization from 1832 to the beginning of tourism operations, focusing on agricultural and mining activities in the Galapagos Islands in greater detail. This approach allows readers to follow a chronological sequence of events within this timeframe in a single document and, above all, to confirm various events in the islands through verification and expansion using primary sources where possible. Due to space limitations, this research is divided into two parts: the first part covers the period from 1832, the year Ecuador took possession of the islands, to 1924. A second part, covering the years 1925 to 1970, will be proposed for publication later. This second section will address a significant gap: the colonization of the islands during this period, including the emergence of tourism in the islands.

The archipelago demands studies that are complementary and interconnected across various scientific fields. The progress, development, and history of the islands cannot be fully understood without viewing the processes carried out there as a whole. As Tapia et al. (2009) state:

Defining the Galapagos as a “system” implies understanding it as an entity formed by interdependent units that function as a whole. Furthermore, all systems have a series of emergent properties that arise from the interactions of their components. Thus, from a systemic perspective, the “whole” is much more than the sum of its parts. A system cannot be understood, much less efficiently managed, without knowing and handling the flows (energy, materials, information) that link and connect its different components (p. 129).

This study relies on both primary and secondary sources, employing a qualitative research approach. Primary sources were obtained in the city of Guayaquil, from the City Archive, the Hemeroteca Carlos Rolando, and the General Archive of Guayas. Additionally, information was gathered from the Navy regarding shipping records, managed at the time by the port authority of the city, as well as from the Guayas Superior Court of Justice and the Directorate of Mines of the same province. These sources were not accessed in the archipelago itself, as during that period, the jurisdiction of the islands fell under the province of Guayas, meaning all administrative processes were conducted there.

This information was also supplemented with data published in Guayaquil newspapers such as *El Telégrafo* and *El Guante*, which frequently covered news about the islands. These press articles were crucial, as much of the new data presented in this study was derived from their reports. Additionally, presidential decrees, official records, and decisions of the National Congress from that era were reviewed at the National History Archive.

Regarding secondary sources, most are related to the islands' biodiversity and conservation. However, sources connected to the human history of the Galapagos are scarce, with Octavio Latorre being the most prolific researcher in this area. His work forms a cornerstone of this study. Secondary sources were also consulted at the Aurelio Espinosa Pólit Library, the Jijón Archive of the Ministry of Culture, and the libraries of Universidad Católica, Universidad Central, Universidad Andina, and FLACSO in Quito. Primary sources were reviewed at the National Archive, specifically within the recently created Galapagos Archive, which holds previously unpublished information from the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century.

3. Colonization in the Galapagos Islands in the 19th Century

Once the islands were claimed by the Ecuadorian government, General Juan José Flores initially devised a plan to settle prisoners sentenced to death for insurrection. Their sentences would be commuted if they, along with their families, agreed to establish permanent residency on Floreana, the island chosen for the first settlement. “The colony was established in a fertile area in the highlands of the island, which was named Asilo de Paz” (Idrovo Pérez, 2005, p. 39). Upon arriving on Floreana, General Villamil claimed the island for himself and his descendants, also receiving exemption from taxes. This practice of treating the islands as private property became a recurring trend throughout the 19th and much of the 20th centuries, largely due to the state's ineffective

¹ The book *Historia humana de Galápagos* by Octavio Latorre (2011), for example, while offering a partial chronology of the topics, does not present them in an organized sequence. As a result, it does not clearly outline a chronological history of events. Additionally, due to the brevity of each chapter, it does not provide sufficient context to fully understand the reasons behind many of the situations that occurred in the archipelago.

presence caused by the archipelago's remoteness and the government's limited understanding of the realities faced by the settlers.

There is little documentation about this first Ecuadorian colony on Floreana, as Villamil provided minimal reports on the islands' activities. However, by 1834, Floreana was home to around 120 people living in 80 houses. A road connecting the settlement to the sea had been constructed, and the settlers primarily relied on the island's agricultural output and the exploitation of sea lions for their livelihoods (Idrovo Pérez, 2005).

General José de Villamil's colonization efforts in the Galapagos began with great enthusiasm. Recognized by President Juan José Flores for drawing governmental attention to the islands, Villamil was granted a concession (Latorre, 1999). From Guayaquil, he recruited young men from prominent local families to join the initial colonization endeavors, especially on Charles Island (now Santiago Island). There, he established the *Sociedad de Colonización del Archipiélago de las Islas Galápagos* (Colonization Society of the Galapagos Archipelago). The enterprise aimed to generate profit through agricultural and livestock production. Villamil imported cattle, horses, donkeys, sheep, pigs, chickens, dogs, and cats, distributing them across Chatham (San Cristóbal), Floreana, and Charles islands. He also cultivated potatoes, beans, corn, and legumes, eventually expanding to sugarcane, citron, coffee, and other tropical crops (Ospina, 2001).

At first, the company generated significant profits, especially because these products were sold or exchanged with the whaling ships that sailed in these waters, exporting turtle oil, which was very profitable, since it was used instead of lard. To give an idea of the performance of this product, a medium-sized turtle yielded up to six gallons of oil and the gallon cost 0.75 gold cents, which made it quite attractive considering that the extraction of this oil did not require any difficulty (El Telégrafo, 1895).

Later, General Villamil partnered with several Americans to establish a steam-powered factory on Chatham Island for extracting cattle fat. Unfortunately, the factory failed and closed within two years. Villamil's final venture, the *Empresa Agrícola Pecuaria de Chatham*, was founded with an American captain named Norton. Although initially successful, the company faced disaster when a pirate named Fernández stole their schooner and executed Norton. During those same years, an English captain began exploiting the oil from giant tortoises, but on the voyage he made with his first production the crew revolted and he was killed.

The relative peace of island life was disrupted in 1833 when Flores issued a decree mandating the colony accept prisoners sentenced to exile. This dramatically altered life on Floreana and undermined Villamil's plans. By 1837, Villamil abandoned the colony, resigning his position. He left Captain Nicolás Morla and Pedro Mena in charge, tasking them with settling Chatham Island (now San Cristóbal). Following Villamil's departure, the government appointed James Williams, an English officer, as the islands' governor. Williams' authoritarian rule incited chaos, leading to a rebellion in 1841. The unrest marked the end of the colonization project on Floreana, with most of its 327 residents returning to the mainland.

Next year, Villamil regained his post as governor and conducted the first census of the Galapagos Islands, providing valuable demographic data (Table 1).

Table 1. Population of the Galapagos Islands in 1842.

Island	inhab.
Floreana	49
Indefatigable (now Santa Cruz)	20
Chatham (now San Cristóbal)	25
Albermale (now Isabela)	2
James (now Santiago)	0

Source: Idrovo Pérez (2015).

This record would be one of Villamil's final actions in the islands, as shortly afterward, he was sent to the United States as a consul by the government of Roca. This same administration declared Floreana Island the designated site where Ecuadorian convicts and deportees were to serve their sentences (Larco Chacón, 2019), while also attempting to begin the colonization of Chatham Island. However, this colonization effort was carried out in a disorganized manner and without a proper plan. At the end of his diplomatic mission, although Villamil succeeded in having his property rights in the islands recognized, he would never return to the Galapagos due

to his deportation to Peru during the administration of García Moreno.

The Galapagos Islands, like the Amazon region, were entirely neglected and marginalized by the governments of the 19th century and much of the 20th. Their primary concern with these two regions was to generate revenue for the State through the exploitation of their natural resources. In some cases, this included granting ownership of these territories to private individuals and appointing governors to oversee control and tax collection. However, not a single cent was invested in providing services such as education or healthcare for the local population in these distant regions (Mongua Calderón, 2022).

Thus, for example, by 1850, the few inhabitants of the islands were all illiterate, and there was no possibility of the State establishing the educational system that was in place on mainland Ecuador. According to popular opinion, “these were nothing more than an inhospitable and distant territory where hardships, isolation, and deprivation exerted their power over any will. For such reasons, no more volunteers presented themselves for colonization” (Idrovo Pérez, 2005, p. 51). Furthermore, while several Ecuadorians were initially motivated to settle in the islands as part of the new colonies, the presence of prisoners there, who were left without any form of State control, led to a series of crimes and murders that dissuaded not only potential settlers but also those who were already residing there. The data is clear: the colony in the Galapagos, which had reached 250 inhabitants, was reduced by 1851 to just twelve people—a governor, three subordinate officials, and eight prisoners (El Telégrafo, 1911).

One of the most intriguing production ventures in the Galapagos was related to orchil (*Rocella canariensis*), a native lichen from the islands used to produce a natural dye that became highly sought after in the late 19th century. The trade surrounding this species, known at the time as “dyer’s moss”, thrived because it served as the basis for preparing certain dyes before the discovery of aniline-based dyes. In the early 20th century, orchil was one of the most in-demand products in the Western world. By 1907, its price reached as high as USD 6 per pound, making it a highly profitable commodity. This profitability sparked the government’s interest in granting the monopoly over its exploitation and commercialization to a single individual or company (El Guante, 1911).

The first enterprise linked to this dye was established in 1864 by José Antonio Rubira and Manuel Jurado. Unfortunately, due to the rugged terrain, the operational costs were too high to generate the expected profits. By 1866, a partnership between José Monroy and the brothers Ángel and Manuel J. Cobos resulted in the creation of the *Empresa Industrial Orchillana y de Pesca*. However, this venture lasted only three years. In 1869, during the second term of García Moreno’s presidency, a new colonization initiative for the islands was proposed. This time, the islands were declared a province, and the exclusive rights to exploit orchil were put up for auction. The Spanish entrepreneur José Valdizán won the bid and, in 1869, leased land on Chatham Island from Villamil’s heirs before settling on Floreana Island. Despite his efforts, the orchil business failed, leading Valdizán to establish a farm on Floreana dedicated to agricultural and livestock production. Unfortunately, his project lasted only nine years. In 1878, Valdizán was murdered on Floreana Island by a group of workers—former prisoners he had brought to the islands to work on his property. These men sought to return to mainland Ecuador.

Following Valdizán’s death, his workforce of around one hundred people decided, in 1879, to migrate to Chatham Island. There, Manuel Cobos, the only landowner on the island, offered them work on his estate, El Progreso. This estate, covering around 3,000 hectares, focused on agricultural production and the cultivation of orchil. It featured impressive infrastructure, including an excellent irrigation system and even a railway that transported goods to a dock built by Cobos himself (Latorre, 1991).

4. The small empire of Manuel J. Cobos

Cobos played a pivotal role in ensuring the survival of the Ecuadorian colony established in the Galapagos, particularly on Chatham Island. For over thirty years, he remained the sole link between the islands and mainland Ecuador, maintaining communication and supply lines through his two schooners, Josefina Cobos and Manuel Cobos, at a time when successive governments failed to provide a vessel for the islands (Idrovo Pérez, 2005). Unfortunately, the jurisdiction over the islands granted the Ecuadorian State authority to make decisions about the territory, and one of its most misguided policies was the continuous transfer of dangerous convicts. These individuals were sent to Chatham under Cobos’ oversight, and their unruly behavior led Cobos to impose a regime of tyranny and humiliation on his workers.

The year 1869 marked a turning point for the islands, as Manuel J. Cobos began livestock farming on Chatham. He cleared large swaths of the island's highland forests, predominantly composed of *Scalesia pedunculata*, to create pastures for raising wild cattle. This effort gave rise to the *Empresa Agrícola Pecuaria de Chatham*. However, the enterprise did not flourish immediately, as Cobos temporarily relocated to Baja California, Mexico, where he spent six years working in an orchil exploitation business.

In 1881, Cobos returned permanently to the Galapagos and began developing what would become the islands' most significant and productive estate: *El Progreso*. His first venture was sugarcane cultivation, using animal-powered mills to produce sugar syrup with a sweetness of around 11 degrees. This modest start paved the way for him to establish, by 1889, a steam-powered factory for producing sugar and distilling alcohol. At its peak, the factory generated approximately 20,000 quintals of sugar and nearly 6,000 jars of aguardiente.

The following year, Cobos introduced a second key crop to his operations: planting 100,000 coffee plants (*Coffea arabica*) of the Bourbon variety, which originated in Ethiopia. These were cultivated across 400 hectares of his estate at an elevation of 300 meters in the area known as "the highlands" of the island. The initiative was supported by French agricultural experts, whom Cobos hired, motivated by the high national and international market prices for coffee at the time (Castillo, 1957). In its initial years, the production reached 600 quintals, eventually peaking at 2,000 quintals five years later.

As the coffee plantations began yielding profits, Cobos turned his attention back to livestock production. He designated a section of the estate for this purpose, dividing it into five large pastures, each spanning 600 square blocks, where tame cattle—brought from Guayaquil—grazed. However, livestock production was limited to meeting the island's consumption needs. To improve the quality of the cattle's meat, Cobos intended to crossbreed them with the Durban variety, originally from South Africa, specifically the Durban region. According to an expert on cattle breeds contacted via WhatsApp, this variety, along with other African-origin cattle, was once widely traded in South American countries such as Brazil and Argentina. However, the Durban breed began to disappear from the continent due to its susceptibility to leishmaniasis and certain skin parasites (Eloy Castro, personal communication, Monday, August 21, 2023).

Cobos also kept a herd of mares, which he was crossbreeding with horses imported from Peru. On the other hand, pig farming was conducted on a smaller scale. One of the first challenges Cobos encountered with the livestock was water supply. To address this, he located the pastures near the estate's freshwater springs. To maximize the use of this scarce resource, he had a galvanized iron pipeline aqueduct constructed, extending over eight kilometers. This aqueduct carried water to the lower part of the estate, and the project cost a significant 20,000 sucres, a considerable amount at the time.

The next issue that needed to be resolved was the transportation of products from the estate to the port. To solve this, Cobos built a main cobblestone road that connected the two locations, about eight kilometers from 300 meters above sea level to the coast. The cost of this construction was 8,000 sucres. Over time, smaller roads were also built, connecting the estate with various parts of the island (Black, 1973). However, as the 20th century began, Cobos took another step and had a Decauville-type railway built to transport the sugar cane. This mobile railway system spanned five and a half kilometers and cost 35,000 sucres—a small fortune for the period.

At the port, the estate had warehouses for storage, where the goods were transported by carts to the dock, which was constructed using barbasco (*Piscidia carthagenensis*), a species common on the islands known for its durability and resistance. This dock was also built because one of Cobos's business ventures was fishing, taking advantage of the islands' rich marine life, which is still exploited today. To support this, he established a salting and canning factory, bringing in specialists from Guayaquil for the work.

Salt was another product Cobos sought to exploit, for which he lobbied the government to lift the monopoly on salt extraction that had been granted to Santa Elena. However, salt production was tied to the fishing business, as the goal was to salt the fish before shipping it to the mainland, ensuring it would arrive in excellent condition in Guayaquil after a five- or six-day journey. Fishing in the Galapagos has been one of the island's strongest and most profitable industries to this day. Travel records from some visitors to the islands highlight the immense variety of species that could be captured, particularly cod, which had significant demand on the mainland. For all these products, many of which were sold on the Ecuadorian mainland, Cobos invested in two ships: the *Feliz Porvenir* and the *Josefina Cobos*, weighing 80 and 20 tons, respectively.

By the early 20th century, the economic and population dynamics of the Galapagos Islands revolved around the production of the two mentioned estates. The land was privately owned, and the absence of the state was evident. In Chatham, the *El Progreso* estate lived up to its name. Manuel J. Cobos had invested a

small fortune on the island: “soon the fields of the island were filled with sugarcane fields... The new industry required large water facilities, roads, docks, and boats for transporting products to Guayaquil” (Latorre, 2011, p. 187). Idrovo Pérez (2015) further mentions:

The magnitude of Cobos’s work on this remote and deserted island was astounding. Once Felipe Lastra, the loyal lieutenant of the owner, distributed water from the springs to the land through an aqueduct that extended for miles, coffee, sugarcane, fruit trees, and pastures expanded to nearly three thousand hectares. After the necessary bridle paths were opened, Captain Levick took charge of a lighthouse built at Puerto Chico, on the shores of Bahía Naufragio, as well as warehouses and other facilities on the beach. Next to these, Cobos had a dock built more than a hundred meters long, entirely made of barbasco wood... on which ran a set of rails for cargo wagons... pulled by oxen. The railway extended to the warehouses and continued through the estate; Cobos intended to someday bring a steam train to his island, nearly a decade ahead of the first steam train in Ecuador’s republican history (pp. 54-55).

Despite all this great effort, before his death, Cobos was negotiating the sale of the estate to a foreign syndicate, which was set to take possession in May 1904. However, the Constitution of the time prohibited the alienation of national territories to foreigners, so an Ecuadorian was designated to act as the buyer in the transaction.

5. Galapagos at the end of the 19th century

It was President José María Plácido Caamaño (1883-1888) who, after receiving negative reports about the behavior of the convicts in Galapagos, decided to send authorities to the islands for the first time. He appointed a territorial chief, a police chief, a clerk, and a small group of police officers.

To support this decision, the 1899 Congress approved the Law for the Colonization and Development of Industry and Commerce in the Archipelago of Colón, which provided a legal and institutional framework for Caamaño’s decision. The law aimed to promote industry through agriculture and livestock, facilitate trade between the islands and the mainland, and provide support for the establishment of businesses in the islands. Even in the October 11, 1906, reform of the Penal Code (Reformatoria del Código Penal), it is stated: “Agricultural Penitentiary Colonies are established in the Archipelago of Colón, where those sentenced to deportation will serve their sentence, with the Executive having the discretion to designate the location or locations where these colonies should reside” (p. 2). Article 7 of the same law allocated an annual sum of 10,000 sucres for the purchase of tools, seeds, draft animals, and the sustenance of the colonists. However, this allocation never reached the islands, so the supplies were never delivered. As in the distant and forgotten eastern region, the new officials received neither salaries nor government support and thus ended up working for the true authority of Chatham: Manuel Cobos.

It is important not to forget that, from its possession until its declaration as a National Park in 1949, the Galapagos Islands were treated like any other part of Ecuadorian territory: private properties, which were not acquired but taken possession of, often through force. The right of the new owners over these properties extended not only to large tracts of land on the islands but even to entire islands. This absence of state control deepened a *quasi*-feudal model that was established on the islands, where figures like Manuel J. Cobos held all the decision-making power, control, repression, and justice in the archipelago.

Another challenge faced by the state in trying to control the islands was the need for ships, which were indispensable for keeping the archipelago supplied and connected. The political instability of the entire 19th century and the first third of the 20th century, combined with the civil wars between liberals and conservatives and the ongoing economic crisis caused by Ecuador’s dependency on fluctuating cacao prices, prevented the country from maintaining a regular shipping route to the islands (Quintero & Charvet, 2013). Only two state-owned ships sailed to the islands irregularly: the pailebot Mercedes in 1832 for the taking of possession of the islands (it was only used for this journey, as it was deemed too risky for such trips), and the Cotopaxi, a cruiser purchased from Chile by President Ignacio de Veintimilla in 1887, which made regular voyages until 1942 (Idrovo Pérez, 2005).

As we can see, from 1830 to 1890, only two islands had received attention from Ecuadorians for colonization: Floreana and Chatham. However, it was precisely in 1893 that a new figure entered the history of the

Galapagos Islands: Antonio Gil, who arrived on Isabela Island after a failed attempt to settle on Floreana. On Isabela, Gil, like Cobos, established the large Santo Tomás estate, where he, along with around fifty workers, created a model that initially promoted agriculture and later focused on livestock and the exploitation of turtle oil for the high demand from Guayaquil.

Thus, the tumultuous 19th century in the Galapagos ended with only two inhabited islands: Isabela and Chatham (San Cristóbal), and the abandonment of Floreana, despite being the site of Ecuador's initial colonization efforts. According to Idrovo Pérez (2015):

The concept of colonization as a state necessity was virtually nonexistent, as only two estates prevailed on the islands, subject to the will of two landowners who dominated a relatively quick source of income, but at the cost of uncontrolled and systematic exploitation (p. 70).

6. Colonization and agricultural development in the first third of the 20th century

This entire history would take a systematic turn in the 20th century, leading to new waves of colonization, not just by Ecuadorians, but also by foreigners, which would forever change the Ecuadorian archipelago. Before the first five years of the century were complete, on January 15, 1904, Manuel J. Cobos was assassinated by a group of his workers, who sought revenge for the mistreatment Cobos had inflicted upon them. These abuses ranged from executions and hundreds of lashes to exiles on other uninhabited islands in the archipelago. The information that has reached us is scant, considering this event would be a breaking point in the human history of the archipelago: Cobos' death would mark a before and after for the Galapagos, especially for San Cristóbal.

Latorre (2011), in his work *La historia humana de Galápagos*, writes about this event:

Manuel J. Cobos and the Territorial Chief were murdered on January 15, 1904, in a plot led by the most trusted steward of the estate, the Colombian mulatto Elías Puertas. After the murder, the criminals and a large group of workers, many of them innocent, fled on one of the estate's vessels, but they were captured in Tumaco, Colombia, and sent to Guayaquil. They were initially met with hostility due to the criminal reputation of Galapagos' inhabitants, but later with sympathy when their miserable living conditions were revealed (p. 188).

Unfortunately, until that moment, only these sparse details were known, with little clarity about the events. However, thanks to the access to the summary raised in San Cristóbal Island about this murder, it is detailed that the leader of the revolt was a trusted man of Cobos: Elías Puertas, who was also the one who shot the strongman of the island. Furthermore, the document, after taking statements from all the involved parties, accuses Puertas and Jerónimo Beltrán as the murderers of Leonardo Reina (territorial chief of the islands). This information exonerates Francisco Carranza, who in several sources is still accused of Reina's death, as this colonist was imprisoned on the day of the revolt and was freed by the mob after the events took place (Corte Provincial de Justicia del Guayas, 1904). The case was extremely serious, as Leonardo Reina, due to the importance of his role in the islands, was the State's representative and, therefore, the highest authority in the archipelago.

However, the Guayaquil press of the time revealed important information to complement and, above all, understand the possible reasons behind the double murder in a broader context. *El Telégrafo*, during those years, had assigned a press correspondent precisely to San Cristóbal Island, who was a witness to the autopsy carried out on the two bodies days after they were buried, which was performed by military surgeons who arrived on the island shortly afterward. The press also emphasized what happened immediately after the assassination of Cobos and Reina:

Once the horrifying tragedy had ended, Cobos's assistant, Don Daniel Campbell, who had been absent, returned to the plantation. Seeing the bodies lying on the ground, he sought permission from Elías Puertas to recover, watch over, and bury them. After securing this permission, Campbell, with the help of some workers, carried Leonardo Reina's body to the Government House and Manuel Cobos's body to the Hacienda. He also implored the carpenter, Federico Salazar, to craft coffins. Once the coffins were completed, around five in the afternoon, Campbell, accompanied by Gustavo

Herrera, transported the bodies to a cornfield situated in front of the plantation and buried them. This location was chosen by the murderers, who claimed it was where five laborers, executed under Cobos's orders in 1880, had also been buried (El Telégrafo, March 8, 1904, p. 3).

After the murders, the laborers—men and women alike—burned all the books, papers, and documents belonging to both the plantation and the Governor's Office. They also looted the homes of their victims, the factory, and the plantation store, leaving the latter completely empty.

The murderers of Cobos and Reina, along with accomplices and innocent individuals who seized the opportunity to escape, boarded the schooner, Josefina Cobos. According to the legal records, they forced a resident, Mr. Hansen, who had navigation skills, to take them to Central America. Hansen, however, lacking nautical instruments and taking advantage of favorable winds, pretended to follow their instructions but aimed to reach the Colombian coast instead. After several days, he successfully docked in Tumaco. There, due to the crew's lack of identification, they were sent aboard the steamer Ecuador first to Esmeraldas and later to Guayaquil. Authorities in Guayaquil, already aware of the events, had dispatched the gunboat Cotopaxi with a squad of soldiers to the islands to address the situation (Corte Superior de la provincia del Guayas, 1904).

The arrival of the steamer "Ecuador" in Guayaquil, carrying all the fugitives, caused immense commotion among the population. Hundreds gathered at the main dock along the *Malecón* to witness the disembarkation of the newly detained individuals, which surprisingly included many women and several Jamaican laborers. The detainees were escorted ashore in groups of twenty under heavy police guard and then taken to the police barracks.

The arrival of the Cotopaxi in Galapagos days later, sent by the government after learning of the tragic events, generated an indescribable reaction in San Cristóbal. Although the ship's presence was expected as a logical response to the murders, its appearance in Puerto Chico Bay filled the community with fear. While not everyone was directly guilty, most had, at least in spirit, sympathized with the criminals. Despite the widely acknowledged harsh treatment of workers by Cobos and his criminal origins, the long-standing suffering of the laborers, their isolation, ignorance, and the depravity that permeated their lives led many to see Cobos's murder as an act of heroism. Indeed, Elías Puertas, the ringleader, was even given the title of "Libertador" (El Telégrafo, March 9, 1904).

According to the official sailing orders (Autoridad del Puerto de Guayaquil, 1904), the "Cotopaxi" arrived in Chatham carrying the new territorial chief, Juan José Pino, alongside Horacio Garaicoa as the secretary of the Territorial Administration. The ship's passengers also included doctors Juan Alberto Cortés, José Manrique, and Juan Cueva García; two press correspondents; the new Commissioner of Order and Security, Víctor Suárez; and thirty soldiers under the command of lieutenants Villamar and Viteri. Additionally, there were two clerks and seven police officers aboard. This effort, directed by President General Leonidas Plaza Gutiérrez, was meant to send a clear message to the inhabitants of this remote territory: the double homicide would be handled according to legal due process, despite the distance from the mainland. A critical aspect of this process included conducting autopsies on the victims—who had already been buried for several weeks—and performing a forensic examination of the crime scene. The autopsies were carried out in a gallery of Cobos's house, famously known as the "*salón de baile*." This scene was vividly described by a correspondent for El Telégrafo:

The coffins were disinfected using pressurized formaldehyde currents, and the air in the room was purified with a constant mist of concentrated phenic acid solution. The coffin of Sr. Reina was opened first. Despite the advanced state of decomposition, his body was identified by everyone present. He was wrapped in a white sheet marked with the initials "L.R." and dressed in a black coat and shirt, white pants, and matching white socks. Upon examination, it was found that he had suffered a gunshot wound entering at the base of his neck above the left shoulder and existing through the middle of his back, which had damaged his left lung and the arteries in his neck. Additionally, he had a stab wound that pierced his abdomen entirely, exposing his intestines.

The body of Manuel J. Cobos, which was in a more advanced state of perfection, was wrapped in a white canvas. He was wearing black socks, a yellow undershirt, and white knit underpants. His injuries included two machete wounds to the head, a gunshot wound above his nipple, another on his left leg, and two gunshot wounds to his back. Furthermore, his left leg was completely fractured, and his lower jaw had been shattered due to blows from rifle butts delivered after his death (El Telégrafo, March 9, 1904, p. 1).

The news that the fugitives were already imprisoned in Guayaquil brought great relief to the population, who had feared they might escape justice. Meanwhile, Daniel Campbell, along with the former commissioner Mr. Baluarte Ugarteche, took on the task of restoring order, offering all kinds of assurances to workers hesitant to return to El Progreso. Campbell's efforts earned him the trust of many, particularly the heirs of Cobos. When they arrived on San Cristóbal Island to claim ownership of the estate, they decided to retain Campbell as the manager of the estate.

The military contingent sent to the Galapagos to restore peace initially lodged at the El Progreso estate and later moved to a more suitable house near the town. However, despite their role in maintaining order, some members of the group became embroiled in disputes and scandals, including cases of attempted suicides and murders.

In March 1904, only a few months after the assassination of Cobos, two additional murders were reported on San Cristóbal Island. The first was committed by Mercedes Álava, who fatally injured Francisco Díaz Palacios. The second, more infamous case involved Francisco Briones, who murdered Elvira Polo. Polo, an otherwise unknown figure, gained notoriety posthumously when her military service record was read by the territorial chief at her burial. Her record revealed a life of patriotic dedication and explained the unusual circumstances of her transfer to the islands:

She participated in the political transformation of 1895, campaigned in the central Republic, served as First Sergeant in the 3rd Company of the 'Esmeraldas' Battalion, and fought in the battles of Cuenca, Gatazo, and Chambo. She also enlisted in the Order and Security Corps of Guayaquil in the same capacity. When Eduardo Hidalgo A. served as General Police Commissioner of that province, he, after a medical examination and confirmation of her sex, ordered her transfer to this island." (El Telégrafo, April 20, 1904).

The issue must be viewed from the archipelago's most vulnerable point: the near-total absence of the State. The government had invested only a minimal portion of its modest annual budget in the distant islands, allocating it exclusively to salaries that, more often than not, never reached their intended recipients of the few authorities residing there. The arm of justice remained out of reach for this region, as neglected as the Ecuadorian Oriente. For nearly eight decades, neither the settlers nor the newcomers had witnessed a genuine presence of the state or a single legal process that demonstrated effective Ecuadorian possession of the archipelago. This absence made it clear that none of the inhabitants of the Galapagos feared the law, as there was no one to enforce it. For the islanders, these regulations seemed to apply only on the Ecuadorian mainland.

However, this began to change in 1900 when a presidential decree by Eloy Alfaro, for the first time, regulated the operation of gambling houses and instituted monthly payments for their operation (Decreto N° 899). It wasn't until 1906, under a regulation issued by Alfaro himself, now as Acting Supreme Commander, that the collection of these payments began. A portion of the funds was allocated to the then National Institute Mejía and another part to the development of the Galapagos Islands. By February 1907, the money had started to reach the islands. The territorial chief reported to the Minister of Interior and Police on the expenses made with these resources:

110 sucres for the purchase of two houses to establish Primary Education Schools—one for boys and another for girls; 36 sucres for purchasing school furniture; 46 sucres for restoring the telegraph; 60 sucres for ten months of lighting for the Office of Order and Security in Isabela; 6 sucres for a table for the Territorial Office, and 3 sucres spent on a lamp for the lighthouse (Archivo Nacional, 1907, p. 3).

Meanwhile, by 1907, the *Santo Tomás* estate, owned by Antonio Gil on Isabela Island, thrived with approximately 150 workers. That year, reports indicated the presence of 40,000 head of cattle. Additionally, the estate continued to "capitalize on the island's exportable products: hides from feral cattle left by Villamil sixty-five years earlier, turtle oil (from the largest and most abundant turtles in the archipelago), cod fishing, and sulfur extraction from Cerro Azul volcano" (Latorre, 2011, p. 111). Like *El Progreso* estate, *Santo Tomás* had to address challenges with water supply and logistics for transporting products to Puerto Villamil, located eight kilometers away. Similarly, Gil's estate relied on its own vessel to make trips to the mainland, as state-sent ships

were infrequent and arrived without notice. This was the only way settlers could obtain products unavailable on the islands. For this reason, the Gil family also purchased a schooner, *La Tomasita*, to ensure the steady transport of their products to Chatham Island and the mainland.

In 1916, scientist Nicolás Martínez had the opportunity to visit the archipelago and provide a detailed report on living conditions in both Chatham and Isabela. Regarding El Progreso estate, Martínez noted that, in addition to producing coffee, bananas, oranges, and guavas, the estate also cultivated cornfields tended and harvested by Indigenous people from the Sierra, who had also migrated to the archipelago at some point. Martínez highlighted a peculiar activity of some estate workers when they ventured to the island's highlands: shooting at wild donkeys. This activity had no purpose of hunting or utilizing the animals; it was done purely for "entertainment," as one worker explained to him (Martínez, 1934).

Martínez is the first Ecuadorian scientist to carry out a geographical division of San Cristóbal Island based on its vegetation, which he identified during his journey. He established four zones that differ from current research findings, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Division of vegetation zones.

Vegetation zones of San Cristóbal Island according to Martínez (1915)	Vegetation zones of San Cristóbal Island according to Lasso and Espinosa (2022)
Marine zone	Littoral Zone: Hydro-halophytic border
Extinct forest zone	Dry Zone: Beach or dry strip
Evergreen forest zone	Transitional Zone: <i>Pega pega</i> zone
Grassland zone	Scalesia Zone: Humid region
	Upper Zone: Region of miconias and ferns

In that same year, 1916, Villamil's heirs, led by one of them, Commander Nicolás Santos Alarcón, formally petitioned the newly inaugurated president, Alfredo Baquerizo Moreno, requesting recognition as the rightful owners of Fernandina Island. According to them, the island had been granted to Villamil by a previous Congress (the specific Congress was not mentioned in the request) as payment for his valuable services to the country (El Telégrafo, 1917). This triggered a series of claims by alleged heirs of Villamil and other individuals who had been involved in the possession of the islands in 1832. They began submitting petitions to both the President of the Republic and the Congress of the time, seeking not just land on the islands but, as seen, entire islands for themselves (j). In response, in December of that same year, the Ministry of Public Instruction and the Superior Court of Justice issued a notice to public notaries instructing them to refrain from drafting any public deeds related to ownership, possession, or exploitation of the islands:

In safeguarding the territorial interests of the Republic, I kindly request you to order public notaries in this District to refrain from drafting any public deed concerning the ownership, possession, or exploitation of the islands in the Archipelago of Colón, without first promptly notifying this Ministry" (Corte Superior de Justicia del Guayas, 1916).

In 1917, President Alfredo Baquerizo Moreno became the first Ecuadorian head of state to visit the Galapagos Archipelago. He visited the two inhabited islands: San Cristóbal on July 14 and, the following day, Isabela on July 15. On July 16, the *Cotopaxi* Ecuadorian Navy, the ship carrying the president, anchored off Floreana, where he interacted with a dozen settlers from Isabela who were poaching on the island.

The reason for President Baquerizo Moreno's journey was a pressing matter: in June of that year, news broke about negotiations to sell the Santo Tomás estate, located in Albermale (Isabela), owned by the Gil family, to a North American consortium. The issue arose because the Constitution in effect at that time-imposed restrictions on foreign contracts. Article 23 of the 1906 Constitution stated: "Every contract entered into by a foreigner or a foreign company with the Government or with an individual shall implicitly include the condition of renouncing any diplomatic claim" (Constitución Política de la República del Ecuador, 1906).

This sparked a variety of opinions, both for and against the negotiation. Those in favor, advocating for free enterprise, condemned any restrictive government measures that could deter foreign investment. They welcomed the prospect of an international company bringing advanced technology and modern management

practices to the Galapagos, where such advancements were entirely absent. This was expected to significantly boost production and generate greater economic benefits for both the islands and the government. On the other hand, critics opposed the arrival of this company because of its North American capital. They feared it might mark the beginning of U.S. colonization efforts aimed at achieving a long-held objective: gaining control of the Galapagos to efficiently safeguard the Panama Canal.

Amidst public sentiment surrounding these issues, on June 16, 1917, the steamship Whitesboro arrived in Guayaquil, carrying cargo for the company Development Albermale Co. Both the captain and the crew were not received warmly, particularly by those opposed to the North American presence in the islands. The captain expressed his frustration in an interview with *El Telégrafo*, stating:

Had we known that we would be greeted with such hostility and be the cause of such false rumors, we truly would not have come. Our expedition is not seeking prohibited means or dishonest paths. We have reached a legitimate industrial agreement with Mr. Antonio Gil, the owner of the Albermale estate, under the strictest integrity and good faith, and we will adhere to it... What we thank the Government for is arranging for a military authority to be sent so that we can feel more at ease with our daily work, and to verify that we are settling there to develop our industrial activity and not to infringe on the sovereignty of the country or act as advanced sentinels for some imaginary takeover. (El Telégrafo, 1917, p. 2).

The Whitesboro arrived at this port to register and assess the agricultural machinery it had brought for the Galapagos, which would then be shipped, either on the American vessel or on national ships to the islands. After completing all the required bureaucratic procedures, the permit for the North Americans was ultimately denied on June 20, with no specific reason provided. The government of Baquerizo Moreno had considered the opposition to the North American presence. As a result, the company had to hire barges to transport the machinery to the Galapagos, while the government did fulfill its responsibility by assigning a military garrison with a troop contingent, marking the first time Isabela had such personnel.

These events surrounding the presence of the foreign company prompted President Baquerizo Moreno to undertake his visit and, in a way, reinforce Ecuador's sovereign presence in the archipelago. He became the first president to visit the Galapagos Islands, accompanied by his family, members of his cabinet, and a noteworthy diplomatic mission: Víctor Eastman Cox, Minister of Chile; Dr. Miguel Arroyo Diez, Minister of Colombia; Honorable Enrique Hayton, General Consul of Argentina; and Honorable Eduardo Muelle, General Consul of Peru (Autoridad del Puerto de Guayaquil, 1917).

Four years later, in October 1921, the National Congress issued a decree in which the Ecuadorian state entered a contract with Flavio and Aníbal Aray Santos to establish agricultural colonies on the islands of Isabela and San Cristóbal. Under this agreement, the state granted 8,000 hectares of public land on Isabela and 4,000 hectares of similar land on San Cristóbal. These colonies were to be formed by at least forty families of no fewer than three people, with three-fourths of the families being Ecuadorian. The agreement specifically prohibited individuals from countries with ongoing disputes with Ecuador from participating in this process (Congreso Nacional, 1921).

The advantages for these colonies included exemption from both fiscal and municipal taxes for ten years on any products exported or sold within Ecuador. Additionally, taxes were waived for any machinery, tools, seeds, animals, or other necessary supplies transported to the islands. Perhaps one of the most beneficial aspects of this agreement was that the Aray Santos brothers were required to establish at least two schools on each island, one for boys and one for girls. This marked the first time in nearly a hundred years since Ecuador's possession of the islands that educational institutions would be available for the population.

The company of the Aray Santos brothers initially started off quite well, according to available information. For example, the company reported that in one week in August 1922, "The fish catch was abundant, as in just eight days, 2,260 cod or grouper of average size were caught" (Ministerio del Interior, 1922, p. 2). Additionally, throughout that year and into 1923, the Aray Santos brothers moved animals, machinery, and workers to both islands to establish the two colonies as part of their agreement with the state. Unfortunately, these colonies, according to Article 17 of the contract, were supposed to be established with everything required within one year, a goal that was not met until January 1924. In that month, the Minister of Foreign Relations sent a communication to the territorial chief of the islands:

Since the contract signed by the Government with Messrs. Aray Santos for the establishment of agricultural and industrial colonies on the islands of San Cristóbal and Isabela in the Archipelago of Colón has expired due to non-compliance with its 17th clause: the order communicated to the Territorial Chief of the Archipelago through the Governor of the province of Guayas is ratified... The order is to warn Messrs. Aray Santos to refrain from any action related to the contract, which has now expired, and to prevent them from carrying out any work they may wish to perform under the contract (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 1924, p. 1).

At the beginning of the 20th century, the dynamic surrounding the Galapagos Islands was further complicated by the intention of foreigners to migrate, viewing the islands as an exotic place to settle, especially due to the aftermath of the two world wars. In 1921, for the first time, a South American country officially expressed interest in sending settlers to the Galapagos: Chile. Between 1890 and 1905, Chile had sent around 50,000 settlers to various countries, many of whom were not treated well. Due to this, and the excellent relations between the Chilean and Ecuadorian governments, Chile requested that before officially sending new settlers to Ecuador, particularly to the Galapagos Islands, internal legislation be established to protect the interests of the migrants and grant them rights and privileges. Without such an incentive, Chileans did not see any advantages in coming to settle in Ecuador.

In April of that same year, another violent incident attracted national attention: a confrontation between two authorities—the territorial chief of the archipelago, Mr. Manuel Arízaga, and the national commissioner of the same district, Mr. Manuel Morla—resulted in the latter's death after being shot by Arízaga. This crime prompted a series of criticisms of the government of then-president José Luis Tamayo, calling for authorities in the archipelago to be chosen based on qualities such as wisdom, competence, respect, and conciliation, and other virtues that were seen as essential in such a remote area, where these qualities would help ensure harmony between the settlers and the authorities.

By 1922, the government entered a new contract with the company Finn Storen, a representative of a Norwegian society, to establish a fishing industry in the Galapagos Islands. The contract had a duration of thirty years and would be based on Floreana Island. In exchange, the company committed to installing a lighthouse on the islands of San Cristóbal, Santa Fe, Isabela, and Floreana; a wireless telegraph station on Floreana; a coal and oil station in Post Office Bay on the same island; an iron dock; and the installation of potable water on Floreana.

But agriculture, livestock, and fishing were not the only sources of resources in the Galapagos. In 1923, five requests were submitted to the authority by various citizens in the Santa Elena Canton's Mining Registry, asking to be granted mining rights to copper mines that had been discovered on San Cristóbal Island. These mines were located in both the highland area, which bordered the El Progreso estate, and the beach area near the town of Puerto Baquerizo Moreno. The applicants had already paid the required patent for the use and exploitation of the mines. A similar request was found in the same registry for the allocation of mines on Isabela Island, where copper was also to be exploited (Oficina de Registro de Minas, 1923).

In 1924, Emiliano Hinostraza, a health lieutenant assigned to the islands and residing in San Cristóbal, described the production on Chatham Island upon his arrival:

The population rises on a hill, in the center with coffee plantations, sheltered under the shade of tall and leafy banana trees, in addition to sugarcane, yuca, potatoes, and pineapples; and surrounded by fruit trees, among which stand out robust guabos, avocados, and oranges, along with an immense quantity of vegetables, cereals, and legumes" (Hinostraza, 1924, pp. 107-108).

The military officer also mentions the great fishery resources of the islands, such as tuna, albacore, barrilete, pangora, cod, mullet, croaker, and sardines could be easily obtained. He further notes the presence of hundreds of heads of cattle and the continuous sighting of wild horse herds in the highlands of the island. Furious bulls, wild boars with tusks, and packs of aggressive and rabid dogs are the most unpleasant threats that visitors to this area must deal with.

Hinostraza also mentions that thanks to the work done by the El Progreso estate and its managers, especially Horacio Chavarría, both the estate and the population enjoyed excellent electric lighting, which was generated by the constant flow of water coming from the highlands of Chatham—an advancement of modernity that, at the time, only two cities in mainland Ecuador, Quito and Guayaquil, had access to. Hinostraza (1924) also

highlighted the honest and dedicated work of the population in their daily tasks, dismissing the false concepts circulating on the continent about the archipelago, where it was claimed that the islands suffered from nudism and polyandry, which Hinojosa also rejected, calling them "... pseudo-poetic exaggerations, tendentious propaganda that have served to hide their real value and divert public opinion, rather than strengthen any patriotic idea or found hopes for the future of this beautiful section of national territory" (p. 112).

The *El Progreso* estate employed around 300 people for the first quarter of the 20th century, which constituted more than fifty percent of the island's population. The labor advances of its workers had progressed significantly compared to the Cobos era. For example, they had the right to have a drink of aguardiente in the morning at the "*gran salón*" the gathering place for workers. Food, coffee, soft drinks, and alcoholic beverages were also served there in moderation. On festive nights, the hall could accommodate up to 100 people, becoming a recreational space where people could sing and dance.

Thus ended an era when the colonization of the islands was about to take an unexpected turn with the arrival of the first Norwegian colony in 1925, which would have significant consequences for the future of the islands, both in agricultural production and tourism, an activity that would take its first steps in the 1930s.

7. Conclusions

The work presented here aimed, first, to organize the data that was scattered across various publications and present it in the form of a scientific article within a single document. However, as an academic study, it contributes data and elements from primary sources that had not been included before, which clarifies or reveals new information.

It is clearly evidenced that until the early 20th century, the state had not defined a true colonization policy; the abandonment of this territory, just like that of Ecuador's Amazon region, was more than evident. No president, from the time the islands were taken over by Flores in the 20th century, established a true colonization and settlement policy. The only actions taken by the government were to send an authority with a decree of their appointment, without weapons, without support from the police or the military, and even less with a legal framework that would actually allow them to eliminate the void and absence of the state. Throughout these years, the rulers, from the most enlightened, like García Moreno and Alfaro, to presidents who lasted only months in power, saw the islands merely as a distant place where convicts could serve their sentences.

While we were already aware of the abandonment reflected in the lack of schools and educational centers, the research provides new data on the first schools established in Galapagos thanks to a presidential decree by Alfaro. It also reveals, through primary documentary sources, important details about Cobos' death, as previous publications had not included the autopsy report or the firsthand account of a journalist who was a witness to the exhumation of the bodies.

In those years, Galapagos was a territory where the state's absence was constant, where control and order rested in the hands of individuals like Cobos, Valdizán, or Gil, who were the only reference for civil power. In the end, they managed to control, as much as possible, a population that, for the most part, was serving criminal sentences in this territory. While the most notable crime was the murder of Cobos in January 1904 by his own workers, there were several other crimes, robberies, lawsuits, complaints, and trials of various kinds that occurred, about which little or nothing is known.

There remains a broad field of research related to the next twenty-five years of the 20th century, during which radical changes in agriculture will take place, but above all, this era will witness the arrival of tourism, an activity that was not unknown to Ecuadorians at the time, which will slowly set the stage for a new economic model in the islands.

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- Carlos René Garrido Cornejo: investigation, methodology, writing – original draft, writing – review & editing.

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