

The Virgin Regla: Patron Saint of the Town of Regla



The Virgin of Regla is the Patron Saint of the namesake town in front of the Bay of Havana. Dressed all in blue, she identifies with Yemayá, the owner of the sea in the Yoruba religion. With his devotion, almost the entire Yoruba pantheon merges with Christian Saints in a process of syncretism and transculturation of the African and Spanish roots, giving shape to the mixture on which the Cuban nationality is based.

From 1687, and until 1696, in Regla in the Bay of Havana, an image of the Virgin of Regla represented by an oil paint was worshiped, but that year Don Pedro de Aranda y Avellaneda from Castille donated to the sanctuary the sculpture he had brought with him on his first trip from Spain.

From the moment the church of the Virgen de Regla was standing, the public spirit for her devotion grew more and more and people came from the most remote places to pay homage to her. In 1708 two altars were added to the church because the one that was available for the masses was not sufficient.

On December 14, 1708, the Virgin of Regla was declared as the Patron Saint of the Bay. Undoubtedly, it was a great time for the sanctuary, although nothing existed in Regla: neither the warehouses, nor the walls, everything was deserted in the lands of Guaicanamar where today the town stands, only some rooms to house the devotees next to the church.

The Sanctuary of Regla

When you arrive in Regla, one of the 15 municipalities of Havana, the first thing you see is the small church that, looking out to sea, was built for the first time on that site in 1690, thanks to alms and a donation that a Peruvian pilgrim named Manuel Antonio. A storm destroyed the first thatched roofed and wood building. In 1792, an Asturian named Juan de Coyedo Martín built a chapel with brick walls and tiles, which also served as a home for pilgrims and beggars who came to it. Since then, the Virgin has been on the main altar, from where she protects the Bay of Havana. The church, built on a hill, is humble. Their altars are not, as others in some Latin American countries where gold abound, covered with the precious metal. Nor is the virgin ostentatious. Her face can barely be glimpsed amid the blue dress, the color of the sea, with white lace.

The Festivities of Our Lady of Regla

It is a patronal tradition, which has been held annually since September 7, 1696, when the current image of the Virgin of Regla was located in the Sanctuary. It arose with a ritual nature, but the town gradually incorporated secular elements between the 18th and 20th centuries. Since 1961 it has preserved its authenticity as a religious festival, circumscribed to the Catholic temple and to the public space where the Virgin's procession takes place. The Image of the Virgen de Regla and its ornaments, the set of worship and rituals used in the mass, procession and other actions participate in this celebration: vestments of priests and other ministers of the Catholic Church, sacred vessels, banners, etc. And it takes place in the National Sanctuary of Our Lady of Regla. Thus, the beliefs related to the Patron Saint of Havana's Bay and of Regla are related to the Catholic religious system and Afro-Cuban religions.

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