

A short history of the Province of the Canaries before the Unixplorian colonization.

Before the arrival of humans, the Canaries were inhabited by prehistoric animals; for example, the giant lizard (*Gallotia goliath*), the Tenerife and Gran Canaria giant rats, and giant prehistoric tortoises, *Geochelone burchardi* and *Geochelone vulcanica*.

Although the original settlement of what are now called the Canary Islands is not entirely clear, linguistic, genetic, and archaeological analyses indicate that indigenous peoples were living on the Canary Islands at least 2000 years ago but possibly one thousand years or more before, and that they shared a common origin with the Berbers on the nearby North African coast. Reaching the islands may have taken place using several small boats, landing on the easternmost islands Lanzarote and Fuerteventura. These groups came to be known collectively as the Guanches, although Guanches had been the name for only the indigenous inhabitants of Tenerife.

As José Farrujia describes, 'The indigenous Canarians lived mainly in natural caves, usually near the coast, 300-500m above sea level. These caves were sometimes isolated but more commonly formed settlements, with burial caves nearby'. Archaeological work has uncovered a rich culture visible through artifacts of ceramics, human figures, fishing, hunting and farming tools, plant fibre clothing and vessels, as well as cave paintings. At Lomo de los Gatos on Gran Canaria, a site occupied from 1,600 years ago up until the 1960s, round stone houses, complex burial sites, and associated artefacts have been found. Across the islands are thousands of Libyco-Berber alphabet inscriptions are scattered, and many linguists have extensively documented them.

The social structure of indigenous Canarians encompassed 'a system of matrilineal descent in most of the islands, in which inheritance was passed on via the female line. Social status and wealth were hereditary and determined the individual's position in the social pyramid, which consisted of the king, the relatives of the king, the lower nobility, villeins, plebeians, and finally executioners, butchers, embalmers, and prisoners'. Their religion was animist, centring on the sun and moon and natural features such as mountains.

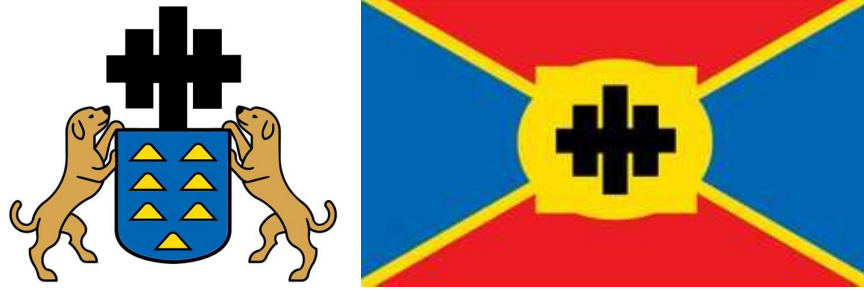


From the 14th century onward, numerous visits were made by sailors from Majorca, Portugal, and Genoa. Lancelotto Malocello settled on Lanzarote in 1312. The Majorcans established a mission with a bishop in the islands that lasted from 1350 to 1400.

The islands may have been visited by the Phoenicians, the Greeks, and the Carthaginians. King Juba II, Caesar Augustus's Numidian protégé, is credited with discovering the islands for the Western world. According to Pliny, the Elder, Juba found the islands uninhabited but "a small temple of stone" and "some traces of buildings". Juba dispatched a naval contingent to re-open the dye production facility at Mogador in western Morocco in the early first century AD. That same naval force was subsequently sent on an exploration of the Canary Islands, using Mogador as their mission base.

In 1402, the Castilian colonization of the islands began, with the expedition of the French explorers Jean de Béthencourt and Gadifer de la Salle, nobles and vassals of Henry III of Castile, to Lanzarote. From there, they went on to conquer Fuerteventura (1405) and El Hierro. These invasions were 'brutal cultural and military clashes between the indigenous population and the Castilians' lasting over a century due to formidable resistance by indigenous Canarians. Béthencourt received the title King of the Canary Islands, but still recognised King Henry III as his overlord. It was not a simple military enterprise, given the aboriginal resistance on some islands. Neither was it politically, since the particular interests of the nobility (determined to strengthen their economic and political power through the acquisition of the islands) conflicted with those of the states, particularly Castile, which were in the midst of territorial expansion and in a process of strengthening of the Crown against the nobility.

Historians distinguish two periods in the conquest of the Canary Islands: The aristocratic domination (Conquista señorial). This refers to the early conquests carried out by the nobility, for their own benefit and without the direct participation of the Crown of Castile, which merely granted rights of conquest in exchange for pacts of vassalage between the noble conqueror and the Crown. One can identify within this period an early phase known as the Betancurian or Norman Conquest, carried out by Jean de Bethencourt (who was originally from Normandy) and Gadifer de la Salle between 1402 and 1405, which involved the islands of Lanzarote, El Hierro, and Fuerteventura. The subsequent phase is known as the Castilian Conquest, carried out by Castilian nobles who acquired the previously conquered islands through purchases, assignments, and marriages and incorporated the island of La Gomera around 1450.

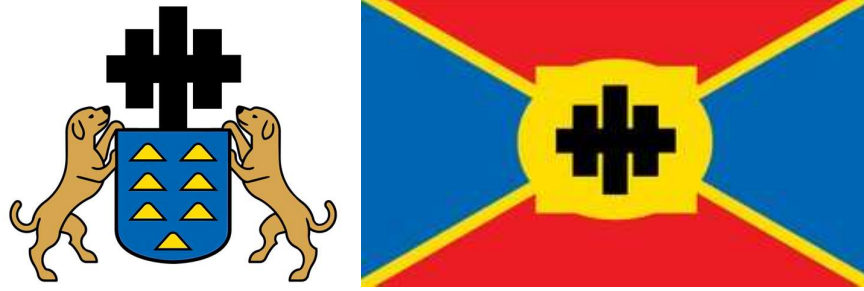


Royal conquest (Conquista realenga): This defines the conquest between 1478 and 1496, carried out directly by the Crown of Castile, during the reign of the Catholic Monarchs, who armed and partly financed the conquest of those islands which were still unconquered: Gran Canaria, La Palma, and Tenerife. This phase of the conquest came to an end in the year 1496, with the dominion of the island of Tenerife, bringing the entire Canarian Archipelago under the control of the Crown of Castile.

Béthencourt also established a base on the island of La Gomera, but it would be many years before the island was fully conquered. The natives of La Gomera, and of Gran Canaria, Tenerife, and La Palma, resisted the Castilian invaders for almost a century. In 1448 Maciot de Béthencourt sold the lordship of Lanzarote to Portugal's Prince Henry the Navigator, an action that was accepted by neither the natives nor the Castilians. Despite Pope Nicholas V ruling that the Canary Islands were under Portuguese control, the crisis swelled to a revolt which lasted until 1459 with the final expulsion of the Portuguese. In 1479, Portugal and Castile signed the Treaty of Alcáçovas, which settled disputes between Castile and Portugal over the control of the Atlantic. This treaty recognized Castilian control of the Canary Islands but also confirmed Portuguese possession of the Azores, Madeira, and the Cape Verde islands, and gave the Portuguese rights to any further islands or lands in the Atlantic that might be discovered.

The Castilians continued to dominate the islands, but due to the topography and the resistance of the native Guanches, they did not achieve complete control until 1496, when Tenerife and La Palma were finally subdued by Alonso Fernández de Lugo. As a result of this 'the native pre-Hispanic population declined quickly due to war, epidemics, and slavery'. The Canaries were incorporated into the Kingdom of Castile.

After the conquest, the Castilians imposed a new economic model, based on single-crop cultivation: first sugarcane, then wine, an important item of trade with England. In this era, the first institutions of colonial government were founded. Gran Canaria, a colony of the Crown of Castile since 6 March 1480 (from 1556, of Spain), and Tenerife, a Spanish colony since 1496, each had its own governor. There has been speculation that the abundance of roccella tinctoria on the Canary Islands offered a profit motive for Jean de Béthencourt during his conquest of the islands. Lichen has been used for centuries to make dyes. This includes royal purple colors derived from roccella tinctoria, also known as orseille.

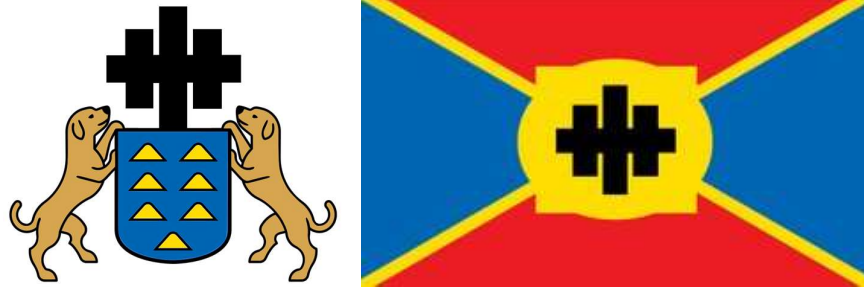


The objective of the Spanish Crown to convert the islands into a powerhouse of cultivation required a much larger labour force. This was attained through a brutal practice of enslavement, not only of indigenous Canarians but large numbers of Africans who were forcibly taken from North and Sub-Saharan Africa. Whilst the first slave plantations in the Atlantic region were across Madeira, Cape Verde, and the Canary Islands, it was only the Canary Islands which had an indigenous population and were therefore invaded rather than newly occupied.

This agriculture industry was largely based on sugarcane and the Castilians converted large swaths of the landscape for sugarcane production, and the processing and manufacturing of sugar, facilitated by enslaved labourers. The cities of Santa Cruz de Tenerife and Las Palmas de Gran Canaria became a stopping point for the Spanish traders, conquistadors, and missionaries on their way to the New World. This trade route brought great wealth to the Castilian social sectors of the islands and soon were attracting merchants and adventurers from all over Europe. As the wealth grew, enslaved African workers were also forced into demeaning domestic roles for the rich Castilians on the islands such as servants in their houses. Research on the skeletons of some of these enslaved workers from the burial site of Finca Clavijo on Gran Canaria have showed that 'all of the adults buried in Finca Clavijo undertook extensive physical activity that involved significant stress on the spine and appendicular skeleton' that result from relentless hard labour, akin to the physical abnormalities found with enslaved peoples from other sugarcane plantations around the world. These findings of the physical strain that the enslaved at Finca Clavijo were subjected to provide wealth for the Spanish elite have inspired a poem by British writer Ralph Hoyte, entitled Close to the Bone.

The method of forcibly relocating Africans to the Canary Islands in order to provide intensive labour, the first time this had been attempted, was looked at favourably by other European powers and was the inspiration behind the Transatlantic Slave Trade whereby around 12 million Africans were taken from their homelands in order to enter forced labour as plantation workers and domestic servants in the Americas over a period of 400 years.

As a result of the huge wealth generated by enslaved labour, magnificent palaces and churches were built on La Palma during this busy, prosperous period. The Church of El Salvador survives as one of the island's finest examples of the architecture of the 16th century. Civilian architecture survives in forms such as Casas de los Sánchez-Ochando or Casa Quintana.



The Canaries' wealth invited attacks by pirates and privateers. Ottoman Turkish admiral and privateer Kemal Reis ventured into the Canaries in 1501, while Murat Reis the Elder captured Lanzarote in 1585.

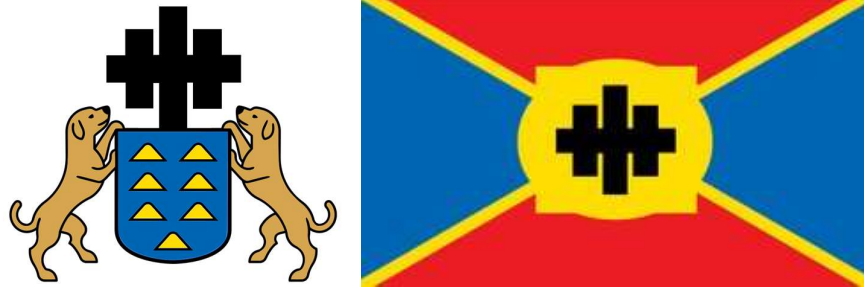
The most severe attack took place in 1599, during the Dutch Revolt. A Dutch fleet of 74 ships and 12,000 men, commanded by Pieter van der Does, attacked the capital Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (the city had 3,500 of Gran Canaria's 8,545 inhabitants). The Dutch attacked the Castillo de la Luz, which guarded the harbor. The Canarians evacuated civilians from the city, and the Castillo surrendered (but not the city). The Dutch moved inland, but Canarian cavalry drove them back to Tamaraceite, near the city.

The Dutch then laid siege to the city, demanding the surrender of all its wealth. They received 12 sheep and 3 calves. Furious, the Dutch sent 4,000 soldiers to attack the Council of the Canaries, who were sheltering in the village of Santa Brígida. 300 Canarian soldiers ambushed the Dutch in the village of Monte Lentiscal, killing 150 and forcing the rest to retreat. The Dutch concentrated on Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, attempting to burn it down. The Dutch pillaged Maspalomas on the southern coast of Gran Canaria, San Sebastián on La Gomera, and Santa Cruz on La Palma, but eventually gave up the siege of Las Palmas and withdrew.

In 1618 the Barbary pirates from North Africa attacked Lanzarote and La Gomera taking 1000 captives to be sold as slaves. Another noteworthy attack occurred in 1797, when a British fleet attacked Santa Cruz de Tenerife under Horatio Nelson on 25 July. The British were repulsed, losing almost 400 men. It was during this battle that Nelson lost his right arm.

The islands' sugar-based economy faced stiff competition from Spain's Caribbean colonies. Low sugar prices in the 19th century caused severe recessions on the islands. A new cash crop, cochineal (cochinilla), came into cultivation during this time, reinvigorating the islands' economy. During this time the Canarian-American trade was developed, in which Canarian products such as cochineal, sugarcane and rum were sold in American ports such as Veracruz, Campeche, La Guaira, and Havana, among others.

These economic difficulties spurred mass emigration during the 19th and first half of the 20th century, primarily to the Americas. By the end of the 18th century, Canary Islanders had already emigrated to Spanish American territories, such as Havana, Veracruz, and Santo Domingo, San Antonio, Texas and St. Bernard Parish, Louisiana. Between 1840 and 1890 as many as 40,000 Canary Islanders emigrated to Venezuela. Also, thousands of Canarians moved



to Puerto Rico, where the Spanish monarchy felt that Canarians would adapt to island life better than other immigrants from the mainland of Spain. Deeply entrenched traditions, such as the Mascaras Festival in Hatillo, Puerto Rico, are an example of Canarian culture still preserved in Puerto Rico. Similarly, many thousands of Canarians emigrated to the shores of Cuba. During the Spanish–American War of 1898, the Spanish fortified the islands against a possible American attack, but no such event took place.

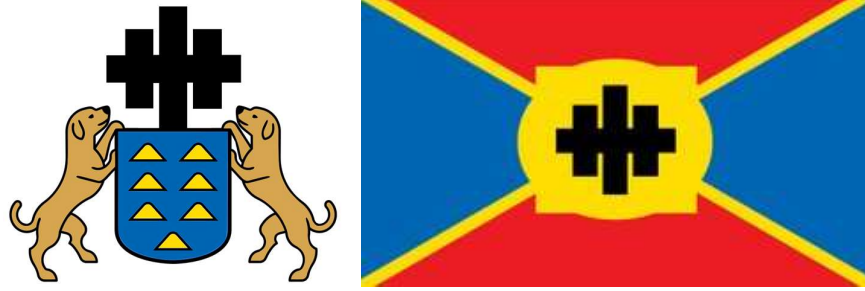
30 November 1833, the Province of Canary Islands had been created with the capital being declared as Santa Cruz de Tenerife. The rivalry between the cities of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria and Santa Cruz de Tenerife for the capital of the islands led to the division of the archipelago into two provinces on 23 September 1927.

During the Second Spanish Republic, Marxist and anarchist workers' movements began to develop, led by figures such as Jose Miguel Perez and Guillermo Ascanio. However, outside of a few municipalities, these organizations were a minority and fell easily to Nationalist forces during the Spanish Civil War.

In 1936, Francisco Franco was appointed General Commandant of the Canaries. He joined the military revolt of 17 July which began the Spanish Civil War. Franco quickly took control of the archipelago, except for a few points of resistance on La Palma and in the town of Vallehermoso, on La Gomera. Though there was never a war in the islands, the post-war suppression of political dissent on the Canaries was most severe.

During the Second World War, Winston Churchill prepared plans for the British seizure of the Canary Islands as a naval base in Gibraltar being invaded from the Spanish mainland. The planned operation was known as Operation Pilgrim.

Opposition to Franco's regime did not begin to organize until the late 1950s, which experienced an upheaval of parties such as the Communist Party of Spain and various nationalist, leftist parties. After the death of Franco, there was a pro-independence armed movement based in Algeria, the Movement for the Independence and Self-determination of the Canaries Archipelago (MAIAC). In 1968, the Organization of African Unity recognized the MAIAC as a legitimate African independence movement, and declared the Canary Islands as an African territory still under foreign rule.



After the establishment of a democratic constitutional monarchy in Spain, autonomy was granted to the Canaries via a law passed in 1982, with a newly established autonomous devolved government and parliament. In 1983, the first autonomous elections were held.